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Storytelling for the Home Enrichment of Language and Literacy Skills (SHELLS)

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Section 1

How to Use this Curriculum

Introduction to the SHELLS Program

Purpose

The Storytelling for Home Enrichment of Language and Literacy Skills (SHELLS) curriculum uses family storytelling and book-making activities to promote children's language and literacy skills. This approach will uniquely assist you in your role to promote children's development by optimizing the powerful influence of children's natural environments and their family relationships, culture, interests, conversations, and interactions. Reflect briefly on your ongoing role and responsibilities.

What do you need to do?

_____ Increase family literacy activities?

_____ Promote language development for children with language delays or those at-risk for academic problems?

_____ Prepare children to learn to read in school, regardless of current development?

_____ Plan activities to meet specific developmental goals?

_____ Individualize activities for children with a specific disability?

_____ Individualize activities for parents with limited English or poor literacy skills?

_____ Engage parents in parent-child interaction and learning?

_____ Plan activities that parents and children will continue doing between visits and after the program ends?

The SHELLS curriculum can help you meet all of these needs. SHELLS curriculum activities are designed for parents and children with a wide range of skills, abilities, and needs. The SHELLS curriculum includes:

- Language and literacy activities on specific topics
- Clearly described tactics for engaging parents and children together in planning and implementing the activities
- Guidance for adapting activities to children or families with special needs
- Specific developmental domain goals and outcomes that can be met by SHELLS
- Tips for individualizing activities for any child or family
- Strategies for fully engaging parents in ongoing language and literacy interactions with their children

These strategies are incorporated in the SHELLS process of making homemade books based on parent-child conversations. Questions to guide the conversations and other interesting language and literacy activities for children are presented in a series of chapters that explore book topics.

The suggestions in the book topic chapters provide engaging, individualized opportunities for you to help parents and their children talk more, ask more questions, and use books more often as a result of making their own books using topics they choose. Parent-child conversation and book sharing will increase as you use this curriculum to elicit parent-child conversations, create individualized meaningful literacy materials, and support ongoing language and literacy interactions.

The process of engaging parents and children together in producing their own books provides powerful opportunities for parent-child conversations and shared literacy experiences. The books made by using the SHELLS curriculum will help children experience the value of print as a link between experience and language. In addition, the process of making and sharing these books provides opportunities to address all areas of children's development. Specifically, the Head Start Outcomes Framework domain specific skills are readily embedded within this family bookmaking process.

A family-made book will be relevant, engaging, and understandable—not only for children, but also for parents with limited literacy skills and experiences. The books will be useful even when parents are poor readers and families have few literacy materials in the home. This will be one book for which the parent already knows the story with no need to read it directly. In addition, the content of the book will be meaningful because it includes things the parent and child did together and talked about together. The focus of your home visit will extend beyond the visit as parents and children continue to enjoy the books they have made together.

Objectives

All developmental areas are easily addressed within this curriculum. Specific strategies and activities addressing each developmental area are included throughout the curriculum. Generally, however, the SHELLS curriculum has five primary objectives: to increase parent-child conversation, help parents support children's language and literacy , create meaningful literacy materials, increase shared book reading, and improve children's language and literacy skills.

Objectives of the SHELLS Curriculum
1. Increase parent-child conversation.
2. Help parents support children's language and literacy.
3. Create meaningful family literacy materials.
4. Increase shared book reading.
5. Improve children's language and emergent literacy skills.

Collaboration: It's not new

The importance of collaborating and partnering with parents has been well documented in all early childhood disciplines at the professional and paraprofessional level. Yet, much of our educational training activities focus on providing services directly to children. Academic training and professional development opportunities rarely build skills in areas that contribute to collaborating with parents such as adult learning styles, parent-child relationships, and coaching. This focus can make it hard to work effectively with children *through* parents, especially if families do not seem interested or are experiencing multiple stressors.

Parents are our single greatest early intervention resource. They know their children, spend the most time with their children, and provide extensive caregiving, nurturing, and teaching. You know development and intervention, and have field expertise. How do you bring the resources of these two experts, you and the parent, together to benefit the child?

Theory of Change

The "theory of change" or logic model of the SHELLS curriculum is shown in Figure 1. The major strategies used in the SHELLS curriculum are getting parents and children talking together, encouraging parents to provide ongoing language and literacy experiences, collaborating with parents to make meaningful literacy materials, and involving the whole family. The expected family outcomes include an increase in language interactions between parents and their children, an increase in families' use of literacy materials in their homes, and an increase in other language and literacy activities. The expected child outcomes are improved language and emergent literacy skills that could be attributed to the children's increased complex language practice, increased exposure to literacy materials, and improved engagement in language and literacy activities. By understanding the SHELLS curriculum theory of change and the strategies that support parents in their role of promoting their children's language and literacy development, you will be able to adapt SHELLS curriculum activities so they are meaningful for any family and specifically address child and family goals.

The theory of change behind this curriculum, all strategies, activities and recommendations were developed with the philosophical underpinnings of programs that serve children through Head Start and Early Head Start.

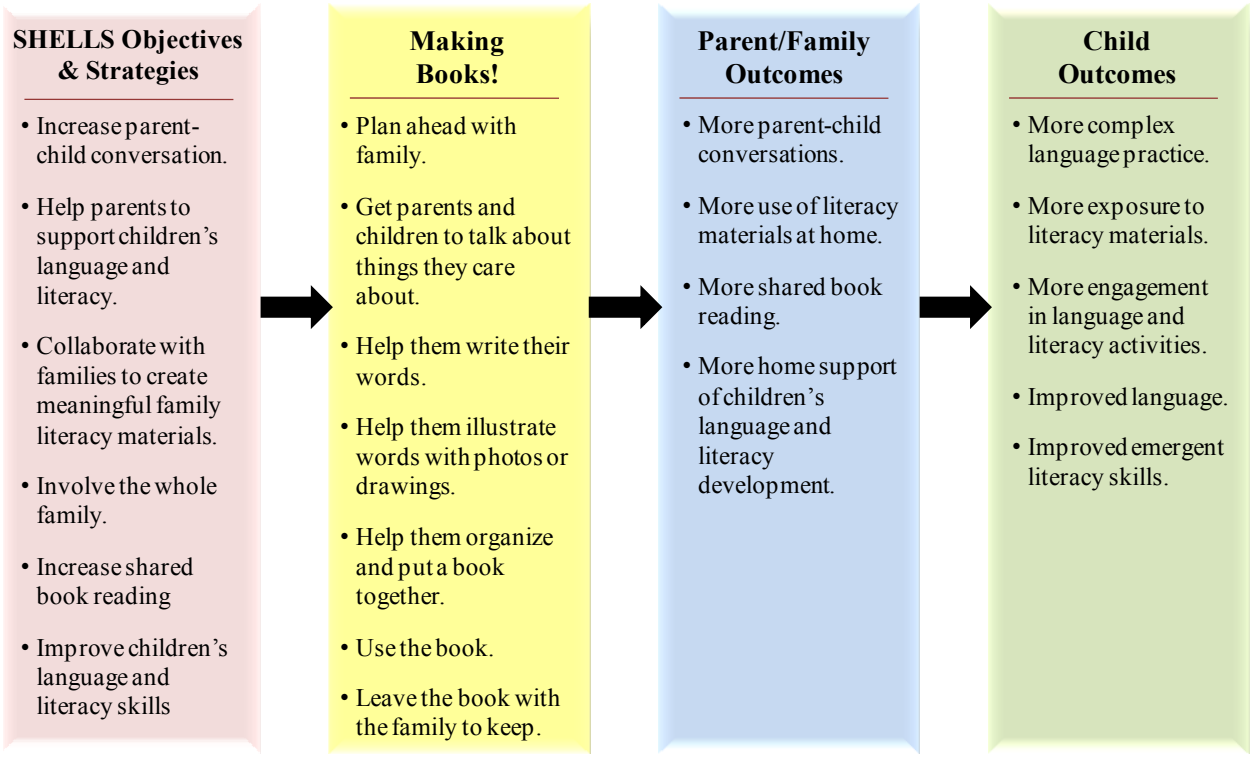


Figure 1. The theory of change for SHELLS.

Organization/Components

The SHELLS curriculum provides both a general overview and concrete examples of strategies you can use to reach the outcomes described above. After this Introduction, Chapters 1 and 2 provide the basic information you need to successfully implement the curriculum.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the SHELLS curriculum and includes a discussion of three strategies parents can use to encourage child language and literacy development: Support, Ask, and Expand. Specific examples of these strategies are later described in each of the book topic chapters.

Chapter 2 describes how to implement this curriculum with parents. This chapter tells how to get parents to use the Say, Ask, and Expand strategies more often by facilitating parent-child interaction and collaborating with parents. It provides concrete tactics for practitioners to use to engage parents.

The remaining chapters focus on a series of book topics with strategies for eliciting parent-child conversations about the topic, helping families make books related to the topic, and encouraging topic-relevant activities to support children's language and literacy development. Each of the book topic chapters is organized into three sections that provide concrete ideas for: *Getting Parents and Children Talking Together, Creating Meaningful Literacy Materials*, and

Encouraging More Language and Literacy Experiences. Each book topic chapter includes examples of the major strategies used in the SHELLS curriculum for promoting children's language and literacy. The strategies are outlined in detail with concrete suggestions on how to individualize the program for each family and how to build on family strengths in culturally appropriate ways. These chapters also include examples of engaging, skill-building activities, all of which are organized around interesting topics that can be used for creating books.

In addition, activities in each book topic chapter are linked to commonly targeted outcomes for programs that provide home visits as part of their services such as Early Head Start, Head Start, and similar programs. Considering these outcomes will help you to address key domains important for your program. The entire SHELLS curriculum is designed to promote children's skills in the outcome domains of Language Development, Literacy, Cognitive Development, Self-Help Skills, Social and Emotional Development, and Approaches to Learning.

The concluding chapter presents empirical evidence of the effectiveness of this curriculum. The evidence chapter presents an in-depth case study to illustrate the synergy, excitement, and ongoing interest that families experience as they create and share their books. The case study shows how the SHELLS curriculum provides a culturally relevant approach to work through parents to support children's language and emergent literacy skills.

Chapter 1: Let's Make Books

Introduction

The SHELLS curriculum will help you to help parents and young children make books to share with each other. Through the process of creating books together, parents and children will have conversations that support children's language development. The books themselves will become treasured literacy materials that will be shared again and again and will continue to support children's language and emergent literacy. While the SHELLS curriculum will be useful for all families, it is particularly helpful for parents with limited literacy or English skills, for families with limited incomes or few children's books in their homes, and for children with language delays or disabilities.

The SHELLS curriculum is intended for use with families in their homes. The activities in the curriculum are designed to get parents talking and looking at books with their children more. The research is clear that when parents and children talk to each other and look at books a lot together, children have rich opportunities to learn words, expand the complexity of their sentences, see how language is represented in print, and learn to love books. If parents continue to enjoy books and conversations with their children, they will support their children's language and literacy after the program is over.

Evidence Base for the SHELLS Curriculum

What helps children learn to talk and read?		Research references
Parent-child conversation	Parent labels, describes, and explains objects of the child's interest and encourages child talk	Baumwell, Tamis-LeMonda, & Bornstein, 1997; Carpenter, Nagell, & Tomasello, 1998; Dunham & Dunham, 1995; Hart & Risley, 1995; Newland et al., 1998; Pine, Lieven, & Rowland, 1997
	Parent and child engage in conversation	Caravolas & Bruck, 1993; Hart & Risley, 1995; Hoff-Ginsberg, 1991; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998
	Parent and child tell stories/narratives in conversation	Melzi, 2000; Neuman, 1999
Reading books	Child sees the parent reading	Goldenberg, 1987
	Parent actively shares book reading with child	Arnold & Whitehurst, 1994; DeTemple, 1999; Goldenberg 1994; Mason, 1992; Newland et al., 2002; Valdez-Menchaca & Whitehurst, 1992
	Family has available literacy materials for child, especially books linking letters and sounds	Mason, 1992; Snow, 1994; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998
Fun	Parent and child enjoy each other during language and literacy activities	Leseman & de Jong, 1998

This chapter will describe in detail how to get parents and children talking together, create meaningful literacy materials with each family for them to read together, and encourage more enjoyable language and literacy activities in each home. In addition, a section at the end of this chapter will explain how to evaluate and improve your use of the SHELLS curriculum.

1. HOW TO GET PARENTS AND CHILDREN TALKING TOGETHER

The first goal of the SHELLS curriculum is to encourage more parent-child conversation. To meet this goal, be an interested observer, ask a variety of interesting questions, and expand on what the child or parent says to get children and parents talking more, telling stories, and relating experiences. Because a primary aim of the SHELLS curriculum is to encourage frequent parent-child conversation, it is important to refrain from asking questions directly to the child. Instead, support the parent. You can do this by referring the parent to the child, "What does he know about that?" or the child to the parent, "Ask your mom/dad to tell you about that." These indirect questions will help get conversations going between parents and their children.

Detailed family stories or narratives begin as simple conversations, often between parents and children. The ability to organize and tell about experiences requires skills that are also important for reading and understanding what is read. Parents play an important role in helping children to develop these skills as they guide conversations about experiences into a meaningful narrative. That conversation can then be captured in photographs and print and made into a book to be enjoyed over and over again.

The complexity of what is talked about will vary from family to family, based on the interests and ages of the children in each family. Four- and five-year-old children may tell complex stories, younger children may give only one or two descriptors, and preverbal children may simply point, gesture, or nod their heads. Catherine Snow, an international expert on children's language and literacy, explains, "Children are limited not so much by their age or stage of development as by their knowledge – the amount of experience they have had with various events and the amount of help they have had in understanding and learning how to talk about the events they have experienced" (1987, p. 471).

By eliciting more parent-child conversations, you can have a powerful influence on the likelihood that conversations will continue after you have left. If both the parent and child enjoy the conversation, they will be more likely to have similar conversations again in the future even if it is a different type of interaction than those they have had in the past. By taking on the role of an interested observer and using effective tactics to encourage parent-child conversations, you can support the parent in a meaningful conversation with the child that can then be developed into a book for the family to make, keep, and enjoy. Chapter 2 discusses several key tactics to engage parent and child together in conversations and other interactions.

Because interactive conversations between parents and their children are important for language development, we outline 3 specific research-proven strategies that parents can use to get conversations going with their children. The three strategies--Support, Ask, and Expand (S-A-E)-

-are effective ways to elicit and expand child conversation. We will be referring to these strategies throughout the curriculum.

S-A-E Strategies to Elicit and Expand Conversations with Children
"S" - Support the child's interests by following the child's lead, engaging the child, and taking turns.
"A" - Ask for more information, opinions, and feelings by using "wh" questions such as why, where, how, and who.
"E" - Expand on what the child says by repeating while adding new words and drawing on the child's experience.

These S-A-E strategies have been shown in research studies to encourage conversation and promote language development, but they can be difficult for some parents to use on a daily basis. The SHELLS curriculum focuses on these three S-A-E language-building strategies and incorporates them throughout the curriculum with examples of ways to help parents use them.

You have probably already used many of the S-A-E strategies with children. The approach of the SHELLS curriculum, however, is not for you to use these strategies directly, but for you to help the parent use them effectively with the child. Your job is to observe, comment, and support the parent when appropriate. It is sometimes difficult to figure out when to support the interaction and when too much support becomes intrusive or disruptive to parent-child interaction. We suggest that you begin by observing the parent-child interaction. As long as it is enjoyable, and both parent and child are engaged together, then you should simply observe and enjoy the interaction. When it no longer seems enjoyable to both the parent and child or they are not engaged together, then you should comment and make suggestions.

Parents vary greatly in how much they talk and listen to their children. Many factors contribute to this variation, such as the education level of the parent, the language ability of the child, and the importance placed on these conversations by families' values and cultures. Throughout the book topic units, we illustrate ways that parents of all backgrounds can be encouraged to use the three S-A-E strategies to get their children talking.

In this chapter, we introduce the S-A-E strategies, the rationale behind them, and the research evidence supporting them so that you understand why they are important to promote within families (see the following Table). We encourage you to focus on these three strategies and use them even more purposefully to help parents and children become better communicators with each other.

Parent Strategies to Elicit and Expand Child Conversations

Strategy	Explanation	Research rationale
Support: *How the Parent Can Support Child Language*		
Engage the child	To have a conversation with a child, a parent first has to get the child's attention. The parent can do this by saying something like, "Oh, we could make a book together. Would you like that?" Enthusiasm in the parent's voice will encourage the child's response. .	Children learn new words when they are paying attention to what is being labeled or discussed, when they experience a new object, and when an adult shows excitement toward the new object. Children learn words faster when they are already attending to what is being talked about than when their attention is redirected. Children attend longer to an event that is similar, but doesn't quite match something they have experienced in the past than to a totally familiar or novel event. Children focus more attention during an event, understand the event better, and remember it better, when they have a conversation with an adult about the event.
	Research References: Akhtar, Carpenter, & Tomasello (1996); Haden, Ornstein, Eckerman, & Didow (2001); Kagan (1971); Tomasello & Farrar (1983)	
Follow the child's lead and allow child's active participation.	To keep the child engaged in the conversation, the parent can do something that interests the child or follow what the child is already doing. The parent can ask the child to help decide what they will make a book about, what they will be talking about, and what they will be doing. Hopefully, the parent is comfortable allowing the child to touch and play with the materials. The parent supports the child learning by doing and experiencing something with hands, eyes, ears, and sometimes whole bodies!	Children learn new words more easily when they are already attending to an object or event and an adult responds to their interests by labeling objects or discussing events. Children increase their language skills, cooperation, and cognitive functioning when an adult maintains their interest. Children are more likely to remember activities that are jointly handled and discussed together with an adult.
	Research References: Barnes, Gutfreund, Satterly, & Wells (1983); Bloom, Rocissano, & Hood (1976); Haden, Ornstein, Eckerman, & Didow (2001); Landry, Smith, Swank, & Miller-Loncar (2000); Peterson, Jesso, & McCabe (1999); Tomasello & Farrar (1983); Valdez-Menchaca & Whitehurst (1988)	

Strategy	Explanation	Research rationale
Take turns	To help children learn the give and take of conversation, parents can keep their turns short enough to pause and wait for the child to respond.	Children's language development and ability to engage in conversations with peers is better when they have had opportunities to practice turn-taking skills through listening and participating in conversations with adults. Children's language development is better when adults have been responsive during early conversations. Children are more likely to take initiative in conversation and be prepared for verbal bargaining and negotiating when adults have been responsive during early conversations.
	Research References: Tamis-LeMonda, Bornstein, & Baumwell (2001)	
***Ask:** How the Parent can Ask questions to get children talking*		
Ask "wh" questions: why, where, how, who.	To help children listen and think, parents can ask questions that begin with the words *what*, *where*, *why*, *how*, *when*, and *how much*. Children's responses may be surprising and give parents ideas for more questions. Asking questions lets children know that they have an active listener.	Children talk more when they are asked open-ended questions that require more talking than simple "yes" or "no" responses. Children learn more thinking skills when questioning provides opportunities to provide additional information that interests them.
	Research References: Dickinson & Tabors (1991); Harvey & Goudvis (2000); Lyon (1998, 1999); McGuigan & Salmon (2004); Palinscar & Brown (1984); Peterson, Jesso, & McCabe, (1999); Tharp & Entz (2003); Whitehurst, Arnold et al. (1994); Whitehurst & Lonigan (1998)	
Ask for information, opinions, and feelings.	To give children the opportunity to think creatively about more things to talk about, parents can ask children for more information by saying "Ah, that's interesting. Tell me more about ____." Asking for more information also encourages children to talk about pictures and challenges them to think of more ideas about an object.	Children move beyond what they already know to ideas that may require new vocabulary when asked more questions related to what they have already said. Children use more language when an adult prompts in response to child talk.
	*Research References***:** Bloom & Tinker (2001); Hart & Risley (1995); Peterson, Jesso, & McCabe (1999); Pine et al. (1997)	
***Expand:** How the Parent can Expand on the Child's Language*		

Strategy	Explanation	Research rationale
Expand on what child says	To encourage active participation in conversations, even if the child is not yet verbal and can only point, parents can label and expand on whatever the child has pointed to, talk about the child's experiences with that object or person, and allow the child to respond. If the child is a talker, a parent can take the time to listen and respond to what the child says in order to support both language and cognitive development.	Children develop more language when an adult provides feedback and additional meaning to child utterances. Children talk more, learn more words, and participate in more complex literacy-related play activities when an adult provides contingent responses such as expansions and clarifying questions that sustain conversation.
	Research References: Neuman & Gallagher (1994); Neuman & Roskos (1992);Tamis-LeMonda, Bornstein, & Baumwell (2001)	
Use new words	To help children learn new words, a parent can describe to a child what both can see in the environment or on a page, but beyond that, a parent can tell the child more facts about the subject matter. If talking about a horse, a parent might say, "That is a horse. They are big and strong, and run very fast. People like to ride them." A parent can talk about any personal experience with a horse. Children love to learn more about the people they care about.	Children build their vocabulary and differentiate between objects (for example, cows vs. horses) when an adult labels and describes objects that children are interested in.
	Research References: Carpenter, Nagell, & Tomasello (1998); Dunham & Dunham (1995); Newland et al. (1998); Pine, Lieven, & Rowland (1997);	
Draw on the child's experiences.	To motivate children's interest and increase their understanding, a parent can relate new things to the child's previous experiences. If talking about traveling, and the child has ridden a subway or airplane, the parent can talk about that. "Do you remember the day we visited Aunt Mary and we rode the subway to get to her house? You wondered how we would know when to get off." Bringing up children's past experiences can help build their memory skills and ability to talk about events in a sequence.	Children are more able to talk about their memories when a familiar adult asks questions about the past that require the child to reconstruct past experiences and access their memories. This process helps children learn to talk spontaneously about other past experiences and share their memories. Children learn to use what they know to understand something new when a familiar adult helps them make sense of their memories of past events.
	Research References: Baker-Ward, Ornstein, & Principe (1997); Bjorklund (1985); Chi & Ceci (1987); Ornstein, Shapiro, Clubb, Follmer, & Baker-Ward (1997); Sigel, Stinson, & Flaugher (1991); Trabasso & Stein (1997)	

Other strategies may also be useful, but S-A-E reflects simple key behaviors, based on research evidence, that parents can use to get children talking. Parents will be at different levels in their ability and willingness to use the strategies, and part of your role will be to support parents at their level and encourage the emergence of new skills. Of course, you will also be encouraging

parents to talk and have fun in each activity with their children and helping them see how much their children enjoy these conversations as they plan, make, and use the books. When parents use these S-A-E strategies, they often find their interactions with their children are rewarding, and they will be more likely to continue enjoying complex conversations with their children in the future.

Many of us have been trained in modeling as a technique for helping parents teach their children. However, we do not recommend this technique. We have learned that when you model the strategies to elicit conversation with the child, too often you remove the parent from the interaction by keeping the conversation between you and the child. Modeling the strategies for the parent often disrupts parent-child interaction. If you do want to use a modeling technique—to demonstrate one of the S-A-E strategies, for example—use the strategies with the parent, not the child. Then tell the parent what you just did and ask them how it worked. Several of these strategies are helpful to use with the parent, such as asking for more information, asking "wh" questions, bringing in the parent's experiences, expanding on what the parent says, and following the parent's lead.

2. HOW TO CREATE MEANINGFUL LITERACY MATERIALS

Making books can capture parent-child conversations in a unique way that produces meaningful literacy materials for the family to keep and use. The books can be used later by the child alone, by the child with siblings or friends, or by the parent and child together. Reading involves more than just reading the words on the page; it also involves understanding the various aspects of meaning the words hold and the value of the book itself. By making books based on their own conversations, parents and children can return to and expand their earlier conversations. In this way, parent-child conversations can continue to support children's language and literacy development long after using the book as a starting point.

It is important for the family to have fun during this process. Help the parent and child (and other family members who are involved) relax and have a good time together. If the bookmaking process is not fun, it is unlikely to be done in the future when you are not there.

To introduce the family to bookmaking, begin with a simple book topic, such as *My Family* or *My Favorite Things*. For any book topic, the following steps will help guide the process for making meaningful personalized books with families.

Step-by-Step Process for Making Books
• Step 1: Plan ahead to help family choose a specific topic and title for the book. • Step 2: Encourage parent-child conversation and interest in the topic. • Step 3: Help illustrate the conversation or story by taking photos or drawing pictures. • Step 4: Help write captions from words or sentences in the parent-child conversations. • Step 5: Help organize and put the book together. • Step 6: Use the book together with the family to support language and literacy • Step 7: Leave the finished book with the family to keep.

Step 1. Plan with the family. Be sure to plan ahead with the family. Planning ahead with families will make the SHELLS curriculum activities more effective. It will also allow you to incorporate strategies and activities to address IFSP goals and other family or program goals within a framework that is engaging to the family. The purpose of making books is to engage the parent and child in meaningful conversation and to integrate literacy into the daily routines of parents and their children. To be successful, the books must be applicable to the child's life. For example, making a book about cooking tortillas may be meaningful for one family, but it would hold no meaning whatsoever for another family.

Be flexible about the process of making books with families. Some parents need a lot of support and guidance for planning the book. Some parents take the lead in planning but need your help taking photographs or writing the text for the book. Some parents are hesitant at the beginning but become more involved as they begin to understand how to make the book and to trust you.

During the visit before your bookmaking visit, talk with the parent and child about making a book together and discuss possible book topics. Ask the parent to think about what she and her child would like to include in the book. Individual families may be interested in different specific topics related to the general topic. Also, the sequence of book topics may vary by family, because families may be interested in the different topics at different times. Some families may want to create books on topics not included in the curriculum. Whatever topic the family chooses, the parent and child will be more motivated to make and use a book when they choose the topic.

Use the book topic chapters in the SHELLS curriculum to discuss with the parent and child the specific topics that are meaningful for the family. Each of these chapters includes a rationale for the topic, questions for starting the conversation, tactics for supporting parent-child conversation, and general ideas for books. The general ideas for the book topics were selected to be interesting to most children and their families and relevant to children's development.

Also, plan together with the parent the materials that will be needed to make a book. Your program may provide some of the materials, but families may already have some materials and supplies they want to use. The following list includes the materials we found most useful.

Suggested Book-Making Materials
• Camera • Printer • Cardstock paper • Illustration materials: markers, crayons, drawing pencils, etc. • Book materials: 3-ring binder or rings for binding, adhesive tabs or glue sticks for pictures, page protectors, etc. • Or, alternatively, small 4 x 6 photo "brag books" with removable title page.

Before you go to the home visit to begin a book, prepare some questions and ideas in case the parent has few. The book topic ideas presented in the SHELLS curriculum are a great place to start, because many of these ideas have already been tried in our work with families who have found making these books to be enjoyable. When you arrive in the home, greet the family and

remind them that you had planned to make a book together. Ask if that plan will still work today. Ask how the parent would like to begin. Ask about ideas for taking pictures and who should take the pictures.

Collaborating with the parent is key to providing just enough support to help the parent feel comfortable with the process without leading the activity. For outgoing parents, you may need to give only a little assistance. For more reserved parents, you may need to make more suggestions at first and help motivate them. The parent and child should make the decisions about what goes in the book. Keeping the parent in the lead makes it more likely that families will continue conversations that begin during home visits and continue to make books after the program ends. Several key tactics to help with this collaboration are discussed in Chapter 2.

Step 2. Encourage parent-child conversation. Use questions in the book topic chapters or other open-ended questions to get the parent and child talking. Encourage the parent to continue talking to the child about the activity. The process of creating the book is a great time to encourage parent-child conversation and to help parents use the S-A-E strategies listed above to increase the child's involvement in conversations and encourage the child's language development.

Additional information about getting conversations going is provided in the previous section on *HOW TO GET PARENTS AND CHILDREN TALKING TOGETHER.* More tactics for engaging parents and children together is provided in Chapter 2.

Step 3. Help illustrate. Take photographs, or help the family take photographs, of the activities or objects they talk about. Some people want to write captions right away, and others want to wait for the pictures. You can decide together what you want to do.

Children love to see themselves in pictures. Engaging both the parent and the child (and other family members if possible) enhances the richness of the book. Encourage the parent to lead the activity as much as possible. Be there to record their "event"—their special time together. How can the focus be less on you as the home visitor and more on the family? Ham it up. Tell them they are the stars of this very important book, and you need to make sure you do it right.

Sometimes while taking photos, the child and parent become engaged in playing a game together, telling a story, or acting out a story. The more parents and children talk together and enjoy each other's company, the better. At these times, you may just observe. Be involved when invited to be involved, and observe in other situations.

Because illustrations become a focus for the words of the books and the conversation around the books, careful attention to the illustrations is essential. We have used photography in testing the SHELLS curriculum because it provides immediate meaningful illustrations. Parents and home visitors decide together how to illustrate the books. Most families and programs prefer using photographs, but the photographer may vary. A parent may be the most appropriate person to take a picture of a child showing a favorite toy, while you may be the best person to take the picture for a child reading with mom or playing ball with dad. Sometimes, a child may want to take a photograph with the assistance of the parent.

When taking photographs, make sure the subject matter is in the center of the photo. Vary the amount of background material in the pictures. In some photos, you may want only the child and whatever the child is describing. In others, you may want to pan out and have a larger background, with the child as well as a few background objects. When appropriate, vary the photo setting so that some photos are taken inside and others outside.

Photographs are powerful illustrations because they get parents and children talking again later about when the photograph was taken. However, there are a variety of other ways to illustrate a book that can be used as alternatives or in combination: photographs the family already has, drawings by the parent or child, cut-out photographs from magazines or newspapers, recipes, stickers, postcards, or other small flat objects.

After you have taken enough photographs (as determined by the parent, child, and you), you may print them. If you have a portable printer or an "instant" printing camera (e.g., Polaroid), you can print pictures during the home visit. We recommend this, if possible, because it will continue the energy of the bookmaking process. Programs vary in how long home visits are expected to last, but with printing and writing captions immediately, the bookmaking process may extend to an hour and a half to two hours or even to the next home visit.

If you use a digital camera, the parent and child can look through the photos to decide which ones to include in the book. After they decide, print the photos they have selected if you have a portable printer. Children are often excited about watching the printer, so you may need to give them some time to watch the printer. Then it will be time to start deciding what to write for captions that will make up the text of the book.

Step 4. Help write text. While the family members should be the ones to decide what goes into their book, some families may need more help than others to figure this out and write it down. Some parents may be uncomfortable writing and will need a scribe to write down their conversations with their children. Other parents may be very comfortable writing, but may be less comfortable knowing what to write on the different pages.

Depending on the child's age and ability level and the parent's preferences, they may want one or two words or several sentences to describe the pictures in the book. Do not forget to help them make a title page with a name for the book and the authors' names (the child and parent).

Tips for Making Books
• Involve the parent and child together in the process • Take pictures of whatever the child and parent choose • If the child or parent wants drawings, include them! • Add leaves from a walk, pictures from magazines, recipes, or other materials • Depending on parents' level of literacy, they can write the words for the books • Encourage parents to write what children say about pictures or illustrations. • Write the words for them as needed. • Encourage parents to use words and phrases that will be meaningful for the child. • Encourage parents to use words that challenge the child

- Print left to right in the same orientation as the illustrations
- For younger children, make smaller books or use heavier cardstock or cardboard
- Help make a title page with a title for the book and the names of the authors
- Be creative!

Step 5. Help organize the book. Deciding how to put the book together, just like illustrating the book, will be a joint process negotiated by parents, children, and home visitors. For parents with older children, the children may take a greater role in actually putting the book together and writing some of the captioning. Younger children may help with the placement of photos and deciding what to write. This process is flexible, and can be decided together with the parent. In some cases, you may need to assemble the book between home visits, before going back into the home, although this is not the preferred option. The process of putting the book together will allow more meaningful conversation between parent and child.

There are many ways to make a book, but a simple way is to use heavy paper or "cardstock" inside page protectors held together with rings or put into a ring binder. Using cardstock for the pages, slipping them inside page protectors, and holding them together with rings simplifies the assembly process so it can easily be done in the home with the child's help. For younger children with smaller hands, it is often better to make a smaller book or to put cardboard in between the cardstock pages to make them easier to hold (like a board book).

A small 4 x 6 photo album with a removable "title" page works especially well. The title page can be seen in the front. We use unlined 4 x 6 index cards as title and text pages and orient the photographs and text in the same direction, just like in a picture book.

Occasionally, a parent does not want the child to be involved in the actual assembly of the book so the book will be "nice." In such cases, you will need to tactfully help the parent plan how the child will help. For example, you may ask the parent at the beginning of the process how the book should be put together and what the child's role will be in this process so that you will be aware of the parent's expectations about the process. As much as possible, let the parents decide, but if a parent does not want the child involved, ask whether the child could draw on the title page or another page to increase the likelihood that the child can be involved. If you propose the book as a shared activity and talk about it that way throughout the process, the parent may allow more child involvement.

Have fun with what you have, and be creative! We have given you some ideas to start, but we know you will have many more ideas! You are limited only by your imagination. Just remember to help the family make the book look like a book, with text and illustrations oriented the same way.

Equipment and Supplies for Making Books
What worked for us: • Kodak Easy Share cameras, printing paper, and printers. • Using printers in the home to print out pictures there.

- Printing pictures after the visits if we ran out of time during visits.
- Cardstock paper so that the pages were strong.
- Clear page protectors for each book page.
- Flexible binders with a space for putting in a title page.
- Small metal rings to hold books together.
- 4 x 6 photo album with removable cover page and 4 x 6 colored index cards.

Other possibilities:

- Polaroid cameras or disposable cameras.
- Markers, crayons, and colored pencils for drawing pictures.

Step 6. Use the book. Use the book together with the family to support language and literacy. The SHELLS curriculum will be most effective if parents use the Support, Ask, and Expand strategies with their children both while making the book and again later whenever they look at the book. Observe the process of parent and child sharing the book and comment on strengths. Provide strengths-based feedback and highlight the positive aspects of the book sharing interactions. Discuss the S-A-E strategies and how the parent can use these strategies when reading the book with the child. Encourage families to use the book frequently and practice these strategies. Parents don't always realize how much children enjoy repeated readings of the same book, and children are especially likely to enjoy re-reading a book about them!

Using the Books

- Observe the parent and child sharing the book.
- Comment on positive interactions with the book.
- Comment on Support, Ask, and Expand (S-A-E) strategies the parent uses.
- Describe the S-A-E strategies and why they are important.
- Ask about the book on later visits and use it again to elicit conversation.
- Encourage frequent and repeated use of the book.

There are two important things about using a SHELLS book, one is about the "using" and the other is about "the book" and what it is and what it isn't. The book is intended to be well used. Children will gain the most from the book if it is available for them to handle and look at frequently, either with other people or alone. The book should be kept within easy reach of the child. If children have not had a lot of book experiences at home, talking with the parents about how to keep this book and others available will be helpful. The books could be kept in a special location, such as a particular shelf or book basket, or in a certain room.

The SHELLS book is intended to be a personal, meaningful, and useful literacy resource for the family. It is not intended to be a precious scrapbook or baby book to preserve as part of a family's history. This book is not just for special occasions or for putting on a high shelf. Some parents with whom we have worked wanted to "save" the book. If a parent wants to save a book, suggest making two books. If a parent wants to keep certain pictures, we have found it useful to make extra pictures to give to the parent.

The book is also not intended as a "communication board" that pre-verbal or non-verbal children can use to indicate pictures in place of using words. The purpose of a SHELLS book is to preserve a family's narrative conversation in text form with personal illustrations, so that the family has an engaging resource for promoting and supporting the child's language and emergent literacy skills.

Ask about the book on subsequent visits. Each book preserves a conversational story the parent and child have had in the past. The book can elicit a similar conversational narrative, but it can also elicit conversations about the process of making the book, new conversations about the book topic, and exposure to print. There is much to learn about print before children can begin to learn to read. For example, they need to know how to handle books, how books work, how letters correspond to sounds, and how words are presented in writing.

Use the book to return to the topic, elicit more parent-child conversation, and encourage parents to use the Support, Ask, Expand strategies to promote emergent literacy skills of comprehension, phonological awareness, and understanding of print concepts. Children's first-hand experience creating the books helps them begin to understand the value and complexity of written language. Asking a child to "read" the story provides the parent with opportunities to support comprehension, provide expansions, and relate to children's experiences. It provides the child with opportunities to practice handling a book, turning the pages in order, and looking from left to right. Encouraging a child to identify one or two letters or sounds can be particularly meaningful when the words include the child's name as one of the authors of the book and the child's own words in the text. As you encourage parents to use the supportive strategies, they will be able to adjust their tactics to appropriately build on their children's existing skills without overwhelming them with commands and questions that are beyond the children's experience and abilities. Parents' tactics can range from simply pointing out their children's words on the page, to asking their children to point out the authors' name (which also happens to be their own names). Repeated readings of the book will provide opportunities to continue to build additional language and emergent literacy skills beyond the children's first experience with the book.

Step 7. Leave the book. The books made as part of the SHELLS curriculum are created by the family, and as such, they will relish their work together. You will know you have succeeded if the parent begins to talk about the book in a way that indicates they made it together, and you are not given credit for the book. The more ownership the family members take for the book, the less it becomes a "handout" or charity gift from you, and the more meaningful it is for them. As such, practitioners should not be the ones "giving" the book; you just facilitate the process of making it.

When the book is finished, if you have the book, hand it to the *parent*, not to the child. The *parent*, not you, should be the one who shows the finished book to the child. That is the parent's role, and one you need to facilitate if necessary. If the book was bound or laminated somewhere else and you are bringing it back to the family, **hand the book to the parent to share the final product with the child**. If you are assembling the book together at the home using page protectors and rings, then provide the materials for the parent to then encourage the child to help assemble the book. Examining the finished product is exciting and rarely needs more involvement from the practitioner than simply being an impressed observer.

3. HOW TO ENCOURAGE MORE LANGUAGE AND LITERACY EXPERIENCES

Although the bookmaking activities are engaging and enjoyable for parents and children, they are not enough. The few hours per month that these activities occur is not sufficient for age-appropriate language and literacy skill development unless there are a lot of additional language and literacy activities going on in the home between visits. The following strategies will guide you as you encourage more language and literacy experiences.

Strategies for Encouraging Ongoing Language and Literacy Activities
• Respond and build on family interests. • Evaluate each bookmaking activity. • Suggest additional appropriate language and literacy activities.

In keeping with the purpose of the SHELLS curriculum to get children talking more, asking more questions, and using books more often, each book topic chapter will include suggestions for additional related language and literacy activities. These additional suggestions for activities are drawn from language and literacy activities that often occur during a child's typical day or are adapted from early childhood curricula. You and the parents will probably have additional ideas of your own that may be even more appropriate in meeting individual families' needs and interests.

Depending on a parent's interest and time, one or more activities may be selected by the parent to try between visits. Some parents are ready to try new finger plays, check out new books from the library, or do a science activity with their children. Other parents may be stretched just to increase the number of conversations they have with their children every day.

The activities listed at the end of each chapter are related to the book topic of the chapter, are linked to other important domains of children's development, and are diverse enough to appeal to a wide variety of families. The purpose of the lists of activities is to provide a starting point for conversations with parents about following-up on family interests expressed during the bookmaking activity. Suggesting additional activities related to family interests increases the likelihood that families will do the follow-up activities and enjoy them. Regardless of parents' abilities to provide language and literacy activities, the lists of suggested activities will be an additional resource to encourage growth and skill development. Several key tactics for encouraging parents to support children's language and literacy are included in Chapter 2.

4. HOW TO EVALUATE THE SHELLS CURRICULUM ACTIVITIES

We have found that evaluating every home visit with each family is important. This evaluation can be very simple but should focus on meeting each family's needs and improving our process in helping the family meet those needs.

Our preference for everyday evaluation is a process we call *SLACP*, which stands for *See, Like, Add, Change, Plan* (adapted from the *Like, Add, Change* technique used by Tom and Sandy Farley who adapted it from the California State Drama Theatre Framework in the 1970s). At the end of the home visit, we suggest that you and the parent discuss these questions: What did you *See*? What did you *Like*? What would you *Add*? What would you *Change*? What can we *Plan?*

Either you or the parent can write the parent's responses on a form with those five areas as headings and space to write after each. Write what that parent *saw* or what happened during the visit, what the parent *liked* about the visit, what the parent thinks could have been *added* to the visit, and what the parent thinks could have been *changed* about the visit. Finally, write a *plan* for what to do after the visit. Keep the process simple. You do not need long responses or full sentences. Short responses that reflect what the parent really thinks are what will make this process work. Writing on the form will help you remember what happens from visit to visit.

This process helps you and the parent think about what worked well during the home visit. It lets you know what the parent liked and what the parent would like to add or change in their visits. This will help you work with the parent and help you to ask better questions about what is working and what is not working. It will help with your bookmaking activities in future visits.

Questions to learn more about the process and next steps (*SLACP*)
• **See**: What happened here • **Like:** What did you like? • **Add:** What could be added? • **Change:** What could be done differently? • **Plan:** What will we do?

The *plan* part of the process puts the parent in charge of deciding what to do next. You can use the planning time to ask the parent about additional language and literacy experiences, included in each book topic chapter, and ask the parent how they might fit into ongoing activities with the child. Daily activities when parent and child are interacting will have stronger and more lasting impacts on children's language and literacy development than what happens during home visits. Parents are likely to suggest activities that interest them and fit into their week, so an activity that the parent plans is more likely to happen than an activity recommended without parental input.

When you come for the next home visit, begin by discussing the SLACP plan and what has occurred. Tell the parent how you used her *Like*, *Add*, and *Change* information to help you prepare for this visit. The SLACP is an effective way to begin and end each visit.

The SLACP process becomes a built-in evaluation for every visit. It shows parents that you respect them and value their feedback and are guided by their input. It leads to problem-solving to identify activities to work on throughout the week and more effective strategies for future home visits. This is a simple activity with many benefits.

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced you to the basic ideas to help you get started using the SHELLS curriculum. The next chapter will provide effective tactics for engaging parents. Then, a series of book topic chapters will provide concrete ideas to put the SHELLS curriculum into practice with the families in your program. Each of the book topic chapters will give you more ideas for getting parents and children talking together, helping them make their own meaningful literacy materials, and encouraging them to do more language and literacy activities. Using the SLACP evaluation after every home visit will help you improve the process and adapt it to each individual parent and child. The final chapters describe what we have learned from using the SHELLS curriculum with families and effective ways to train, mentor, and supervise within this approach.

Chapter 2: Using SHELLS with Parents

Because positive experiences with conversations and books are so valuable for children's early language and emergent literacy, the SHELLS curriculum is designed to do three things:

- Enrich parent-child conversation,
- Help families create meaningful literacy materials, and
- Encourage parents to support children's ongoing language and literacy.

All three of these things require *parent engagement* in the process. When parents are fully engaged in home visit activities, they will learn more about how to continue promoting language and literacy between visits and after the program is over. There is simply not enough time in weekly one or two hour visits for children to have the language and literacy experiences they need for their development in these domains. Without parent engagement, in-home programs for young children are unlikely to be effective.

Are Parents Engaged in Your Home Visits?

Certain signs, or "Red Flags," suggest that parents are not fully engaged in your program. When you see Red Flags, like those listed in the box below, these are signs that your tactics are not effectively engaging parents in supporting their children's development. If you are seeing some of these Red Flags on your home visits, you may want to try some new or different tactics such as those described later in this chapter.

"Red Flags"—Signs of Ineffectiveness

- The parent leaves the room during your visit.
- The child is excited to see <u>*you*</u> because of the toys or materials *you* bring.
- You spend a lot of time discussing family problems but *not* the child's development.
- The parent or child seem distracted from the visit when other family members are there.
- You would like to visit more often, so the child could get more services.
- Parents apologize for not doing activities that *you* assigned them to do between visits.
- Parents say to you, "You are *so* good with children," because *you* do such a good job with theirs.
- Parents tell you the child "really enjoys doing the activities with *you*."

These Red Flags are common, but they are also signs that your visits with families are not as effective as they could be. To use the SHELLS curriculum effectively, assess your own practices. Consider which of the strategies and tactics in this chapter you are already using that you could use more often and which might be easily added to your visits. Consider what you could say to the parent, what you could try, what you could ask from your supervisor.

Each book topic chapter in the SHELLS curriculum has specific questions to elicit parent-child conversation, examples of parenting strategies to support children's language and literacy, tips for helping families make a book on that topic, and ideas for things parents can do to continue supporting children's language and literacy. This chapter offers more general guidance on assumptions, strategies, and tactics that make the SHELLS curriculum effective at eliciting conversation, helping parents support language and literacy, and establishing a collaborative partnership with parents. When the SHELLS curriculum is effective, parents will continue to have conversations and share books with their child even after the program is over.

How to Increase Parent Engagement

Key Assumptions

The SHELLS curriculum is based on a few key assumptions about the kind of program that will be using the curriculum. Because we designed the SHELLS curriculum to encourage parent-child conversations and book sharing, we recommend a parenting-focused model that emphasizes parent-child interaction. The key assumptions of this model are based on research evidence.

Evidence-Based Key Assumptions about Working with Parents of Young Children

Key assumptions	Research evidence	Reference
Parent and child can both be engaged in learning.	Home visit programs are likely to have impacts on parenting that then, in turn, have impacts on children. Facilitating parent-child interaction is related to more family improvement.	ACYF, 2002; Daro & Harding, 1999; Gomby, 1999; Guralnick, 1998; Roggman et al., 200; van den Boom, 1995
Parents can teach their children.	Directly encouraging parents to teach is effective and related to child outcomes.	Guralnick, 1989; Hebbler & Gerlach-Downie, 2002; Pfannenstiel, J., & Seltzer, 1989
Parents can work together with practitioner collaboratively	Jointly planning visits and reviewing activities increases parenting capacity and has lasting impacts.	Hebbler & Gerlach-Downie, 2002;Dunst, Trivette, & Hamby, 2006 (DEC)
The whole family can be involved.	Father and sibling involvement supports children's language development & learning of certain kinds of words.	Roggman et al. 2004; Azmitia & Hesser, 1993; Oshima-Takane et al., 2996; Perez-Granados & Callanan 1997.

The first key assumption of the SHELLS curriculum is that successful interventions engage both parents and children in learning together. This assumption is based both on logic and research evidence. The parent will remain in the child's life long after the program ends, so establishing parent-child interactions as opportunities for learning language and literacy has the potential to foster child language and literacy development for many years. Research shows that programs that work with parents and children in their homes can have impacts on parenting behavior that, in turn, affect children's development. Additional key assumptions about the best ways to work with parents are based on studies of programs that work with parents to promote early child development.

From our own studies and research by others, the evidence supports practices that get parents and children involved together in activities that you plan jointly with the parent. The key assumptions of a parenting-focused model involve interaction, teaching, collaboration, and family involvement.

Based on these assumptions, several key strategies and tactics will help you elicit parent-child conversations, establish collaborations to make books with each family, and encourage positive language and literacy experiences that involve the whole family. If you work in a parenting-focused program, you may already have experience using many of these strategies and tactics. Other strategies and tactics may require some practice.

Key Strategies

To use the SHELLS curriculum effectively, use the strategies and tactics in this chapter to get parents and children talking together and sharing books so these activities become an ongoing part of the family's life. Three key strategies are based on most of these assumptions above. These include commenting on observations, asking for information, and offering information or materials that are requested. These three strategies are important for getting parents and children talking, helping them make books, and encouraging them to do other language and literacy activities in their everyday lives.

Key Strategy #1: Observe and Comment. "Say what you see and hear" (SWYSH) is an easy way to remember to observe and comment. This is a useful strategy for encouraging parent-child interactions and conversations and for providing specific feedback to encourage parents to use the Support, Ask, and Expand (S-A-E) strategies.

- Listen to parent-child conversations and watch parent-child interactions involved in making books.
- Describe what you see or hear.
- Expand on comments made by parents or children.
- Give specific feedback to parents when they use the S-A-E strategies in the SHELLS curriculum.

Key Strategy #2: Ask for Information. Asking for more information can keep both parents and children talking. Each chapter will have specific questions related to the book topics. More

generally, asking about family experiences, interests, preferences, and stories will encourage interesting exchanges between parent and child. It is also helpful to ask the parent questions about the child's behavior and responses to what the parent says. By asking the parent about the child's interests, skills, experiences, or feelings, you can help the parent focus on the child and the child's developmental needs. The parent's answers to your questions will help guide the parent's interactions and activities with the child.

- Ask questions of parents or children to keep them talking or get them thinking.
- Ask questions about the child's interests and feelings to encourage parent responsiveness.
- Ask questions about family preferences and culture to increase your sensitivity to family needs and values.
- Ask questions about the child's skills and emerging skills to help parents observe development.
- Ask questions about what works and what doesn't to help parents solve problems.

Key Strategy #3: Offer available resources, if they are requested. Information, materials, or other resources can be offered if parents want them. Parents often need more information about children's development and how they can support it, but a barrage of information can be overwhelming and even annoying to parents, especially those who are busy or lack confidence. When a parent asks for information, then the information will be appropriate and useful. This is also true of other resources such as art supplies for making books. Families may have some supplies already and, if so, it is good to use what they have because if it is something they keep around their home, it is likely to be there again in the future, even after the program ends. Information about or help with community resources will be appreciated when wanted but may be met with resistance or passivity when unwanted.

- Offer information when the parent asks about it.
- Offer information when it is appropriate to the situation.
- Offer materials that the parent asks for or the family does not have.
- Offer information and help with community resources if needed and wanted.
- Offer information about development to help parents support children's development.
- Offer suggestions sparingly.

The next section will list tactics, the concrete specific things you can do to apply these strategies. Tactics will be listed that can be used to engage parent and child together, to encourage parents to support child language and literacy, to work collaboratively with parents, and to involve other family members.

Tactics to Engage Parent and Child Together

The first aim of the SHELLS curriculum is to increase and enrich parent-child conversations. Therefore, the first assumption of a parenting-focused model is that parent and child participate together in the curriculum activities.

Key Assumption #1: Parent and child can both learn from being engaged together in fun activities. The SHELLS curriculum involves parents and children together in rich conversations and activities. To facilitate parent-child conversations and interactions, spend most of the home visit time interacting with both parent and the child together. If you interact too much with only the child, the child's attention becomes focused on you instead of the parent. If you focus too much on the parent, having conversations that do not involve the child or are not about the child, the child is likely to lose interest. The activities of the SHELLS curriculum are designed to support parents in their role as early educators, so most interactions during a SHELLS home visit involve the parent and child together. Some interactions can involve both you and the parent with the child, a few can involve you with the parent, but very few interactions should involve only you and the child. Your role is to get the parent and child interacting and talking with each other more and for longer periods of time. Don't get in the way.

Parent-child conversation is a central component of the SHELLS curriculum. Parent-child conversations often begin in infancy as one-sided conversations with babies who do not even make speech sounds yet. Research shows, however, that consistent exposure to lots of words and lots of different kinds of words helps children learn language better. Early conversations may involve the parent paying attention to where a child is looking and talking about what the child sees. As children learn more language, these conversations may involve the parent explaining things, answering questions, telling stories, and talking about books. Parent-child conversations while reading books, telling stories, playing together, and sharing family routines support language and also the early beginnings of literacy. When parents enjoy lots of conversations and books with their young children, the children are better prepared to learn reading skills later when they are old enough to go to school.

Use Key Strategy #1 to observe and comment on parent-child conversation. Because parent-child conversations are a central part of the SHELLS curriculum activities, you need to be alert for opportunities to elicit and expand parent-child conversation. Behaviors that are effective at eliciting conversation include simply listening for any language exchange and making a positive comment about it.

The SHELLS curriculum describes in detail the Support, Ask, and Expand (S-A-E) strategies that parents can use to encourage children to practice their language skills. Listen for these strategies and comment on them to parents who may use many of these strategies without realizing it. For example, when a parent responds to a child's description of a family event by asking, "whose house were we at?" the parent is asking a "wh" question that helps children's language and literacy development. Pointing this out will increase parent's awareness of the simple kinds of questions they are already asking that will help children use more language.

Use Key Strategy #2 to ask for more information to elicit conversation. To get parents and children talking together, prompt parents to listen closely to what their children say or to watch closely what their children do or pay attention to, and then suggest ways for parents to respond. By talking about things their children show curiosity about, parents can take advantage of children's interests to get their attention and get them talking. When children are just starting to talk, ask about the children's expressions, vocalizations, and beginning words to help parents respond to what the beginning talker seems to be "saying," whether it is verbal or not. When

children are using very little language, help the parent plan for times and activities in which the child is likely to be more vocal and verbal.

Use Key Strategy #3 to offer resources the parent wants and needs. Suggest other resources or provide information or materials that may help elicit parent-child conversation. Sometimes information about a family interest or activity will spark conversation. Sometimes, if a parent is interested in community events or activities for children, information about the zoo or county fair could lead to later conversations about the family's experiences going to those places. You can provide needed information and help accessing community resources as a way of eliciting more parent-child conversation.

Each book topic chapter in the SHELLS curriculum lists specific topic-related examples of what the parent can say to the child when applying the parenting strategies that get children talking and practicing their language skills. Each topic chapter also provides some specific examples of what you can say to encourage parents to use those strategies. To encourage parent-child interactions, expand on what parents and children already enjoy doing and what they already talk about—that is, build on family strengths. The tactics described in the following table can help elicit and maintain parent-child conversations while using the SHELLS curriculum with families.

Tactics to Engage Parent and Child Together

Tactic	Example
Observe & comment on conversation	"He really had a lot to say when you started asking him questions about his toy cars."
Observe & comment on responsiveness	"You figured out what she was trying to say and gave her a word to use."
Observe & comment on encouragement	"When you smiled and said 'go ahead,' it helped her keep talking."
Ask about child's verbalizations	"What is he saying?"
Ask questions about child's interests	"What does she like to do at the park?"
Ask about what child can do	"Can he reach the shelf with the picture books?"
Offer information about community resources	"On our next visit we could go to the thrift store and find some things she can use for pretending."
Offer information about development	"Asking him about his own experiences helps him practice using words he is learning."
Offer materials to read or use	"I could bring some pictures of dogs if she likes to talk about dogs."

Tactics to Encourage Parents to Support Child Language and Literacy

The SHELLS curriculum also aims to encourage parents to keep supporting their children's language and literacy. Therefore, a parenting-focused model emphasizes the kinds of parenting behaviors that help children practice language and enjoy literacy.

Key Assumption #2: Parents CAN teach their children successfully. The SHELLS curriculum focuses more generally on language development and literacy experiences and more particularly on each child's experiences and less on whether or not a child has a certain skill by a certain age. Assessments of language development or phonological skills can help you and parents see what extra help a child may need. But whether a child is developing typically or is ahead or behind the developmental level of an average child the same age, SHELLS curriculum activities can be adapted to provide experiences to increase language and pre-literacy skills at the child's developmental level.

As part of the SHELLS curriculum, encourage parents to support their children's language and literacy development. The S-A-E of parent strategies, Support, Ask, and Expand, are the specific parent behaviors to encourage. Effective tactics include commenting on observations of these behaviors, asking for information about the context for and child response to these parent behaviors, and offering information and materials, if requested, that are related to language and literacy development.

Use Key Strategy #1 to observe and comment on how parent supports the child's language and literacy. Carefully watch parent-child interactions and listen to parent-child conversation and then describe it to the parent to provide feedback that encourages the parent in these interactions. When using the SHELLS curriculum, these observations emphasize the language exchanges in parent-child conversations and other parent-child interactions involved in making books.

The child's language skills and responses to the parent along with the parent's response to the child are important to observe and describe. By commenting on observations, you direct the focus of attention toward the child and toward parent-child interactions. By saying what you see, you help parents become better observers of both their children and themselves. Allowing time for the parent and child to keep talking and interacting, with time to pause and then continue, results in better observations. Descriptions that include concrete details of the behaviors and responses will help parents learn to pay more attention to details and help them remember things to look for in the future.

Use Key Strategy #2 to ask for more information about the child's language and literacy. Asking for information about the child's typical language and behavior is another tactic that encourages parents to become better observers of their children's language development and interest in literacy materials. Ask parents questions about how their children respond to various books, but also to other kinds of literacy materials, such as stories, songs, or environmental print. Also ask parents about children's favorite activities and interests that can be used for getting children involved in conversations and books. By asking these kinds of questions, you can keep the focus on children's development and encourage parents as good observers and providers of appropriate language and literacy opportunities for their children. A simple question such as, "When does he talk most during the day?" can help a parent reflect on a child's typical behavior and find opportunities to support the child's language development. You then have an opportunity to talk about what a parent can do to encourage children to talk, such as asking open-ended questions, prompting, repeating, and expanding. Other questions may help parents focus on a child's likes and dislikes, such as, "Does he like to look at books by himself?" You can also ask the parent

questions about their own typical behavior with the child, for example, "When are you most likely to tell him stories?"

Use Key Strategy #3 to offer resources the parents wants and needs. Offering resources such as information on the community library or materials for language and literacy activities is a tactic you can use to help keep the focus on the child's language and literacy development. You can make information more relevant, meaningful, and memorable to parents if it is related to the current SHELLS curriculum activities. Several ideas and tips are provided in each book topic chapter of the SHELLS curriculum. Parents may need additional ideas or background information on a particular topic and may need your help in getting access to accurate information. Or they may express an interest in materials that the program could provide, such as art materials or other materials that may help in creating meaningful literacy materials in the SHELLS curriculum.

Tactics to Encourage Parents to Support Child Language and Literacy

Tactics	Example
Observe and comment on positive interaction	"I could tell from the laughter that you two had a lot of fun reading that book!"
Observe and comment on development	"I notice he's starting to put words together; he said 'book mine'."
Observe and comment on child response	"When you were asking her questions, I noticed she was really engaged in the conversation."
Observe and comment on mother response	"You noticed his change in attention right away and asked him what he was looking at."
Ask how child responds	"Does she get bored hearing the same story again or does she want you to tell it again and again?"
Ask what child can do	"Does he turn the pages when you look at books together?"
Ask about child interests	"What kinds of toys does she like best?"
Ask about the difference between when things work and when they don't	"He seems to pay attention more sometimes than others. What are you doing when he pays attention compared to when he doesn't?"
Offer information about development	"Children need to learn quite a few words before they start putting them together in sentences."
Offer information materials to read or use	"Let me know if you want a list of children's books to look for at the library."

Tactics to Work Collaboratively With Parents

The second primary aim of the SHELLS curriculum is to create meaningful literacy materials with the family. The SHELLS curriculum therefore assumes that you will work together with parents, sharing ideas and planning together as partners.

Key Assumption #3: Practitioner and parent CAN work together as collaborators. In a collaborative partnership, both partners contribute to the process, and both are assumed to have

areas of competence. You have training and this curriculum as basic resources; parents have their own experiences and relationships with their children. Working together as collaborators increases the parent's knowledge and skills so that activities similar to those in the SHELLS curriculum can continue later without you. Planning and doing activities together with the parent will help you learn more about the family, their culture, and their traditions. To make the SHELLS curriculum work well for every family, help parents adapt activities for their own family's interests, situation, cultural traditions, and values. When activities and materials are a good "fit" for the family, parents will use them again to support children's language and literacy.

In a parenting-focused model, you and the parent are collaborators, and you are in a role as a supportive consultant. A supportive consultant provides detailed observational feedback, asks about specific possible behaviors, and offers needed background information. The roles of you and the parent form a collaborative partnership with goals of promoting the child's language and literacy development, sharing ideas, and making plans together. This approach is based on recognition and support of family strengths and values. By using this approach, you can establish a balanced partnership with parents and keep the parent as the expert in the parenting role. To keep the parent in the parenting role, it is necessary to stay out of that role, to respect the parent's expertise in that role, and to provide support and encouragement for the parent to stay and grow in that role. By establishing a collaborative partnership from the beginning of a parenting-focused program, you can keep parents in the role of the main supporter of early development.

Use Key Strategy #1 to observe and comment how the parent responds to and supports the child. By providing detailed observational feedback, you will be encouraging the parent in their role as the primary adult supporting the child's language and literacy development. Also, use comments on your observations to provide feedback about the effectiveness of specific language and literacy activities, including book making, that you plan together with the parent. Your observations can provide motivation for the parent to continue to plan more activities to support child language and literacy and to use information about the child's response to guide the planning of future activities.

Use Key Strategy # 2 to ask questions to get information to guide your collaboration. An important way to establish a collaborative relationship using the SHELLS curriculum is to ask the parent questions about the child, the parent, and the family. Use these questions to learn more about the family, about the kinds of conversations they already have, about the kinds of literacy materials they already use together. Ask about the child's interests, what the child and family do for fun, what the parent wants the child to learn, what the parent is comfortable doing. Then use the parent's answers to these questions to make suggestions or give feedback. Conversations and book topics that build on the child's interests and the parent's preferences are more likely to be successful than those that are initiated or selected by someone else.

Ask parents about their preferences when planning SHELLS curriculum activities. To build collaboration, plan the activities together with the parent. Often the first session or visit is only for explaining the SHELLS curriculum and planning the next session. From then on, each session involves some time planning for the next session. Although parents vary on how prepared they are to select book topics and plan the SHELLS activities, you can gradually shift

increasingly more of the planning to the parent over time. Our experience has been that parents DO take a bigger role in the planning process over time, because the books are meaningful to them and their children. The SHELLS curriculum will make it easier to plan together because each topic chapter describes specific ways of helping the parent and child explore the topic. The SHELLS topic of "favorite things" will help you and the parent reflect on what the child enjoys and will help in later sessions to plan activities that will engage the child. By planning each subsequent session and learning how to use the SHELLS activities for their children's language and literacy development, parents will become ready, by the end of the program, to continue providing a supportive environment for language and literacy development.

Use Key Strategy #3 to offer resources the parent wants and needs. As a sign of the collaborative partnership, hand any materials the program provides for activities directly to the parent, not the child. This could include paper for making books, a camera for taking pictures for the books, art supplies for illustrating the books, or other materials brought for additional language and literacy activities. By always handing materials to the parent, you show that the parent is the one in charge of these activities. This behavior keeps the parent in the role of the real "teacher," while you offer information, support, and encouragement to the parent. Handing materials to the parent also sends a message to the child that it is the parent who does the fun activities. This simple action, repeated many times, establishes parent-child interaction as the context for fun and learning.

A child's eagerness about your visit is a good sign because it indicates that the previous sessions have been fun for the child. If the child expects you to be the one providing the fun, however, that is not a good sign because it indicates that you have not been as effective in helping the parent become the one to provide the fun. Your arrival for a home visit should signal to both child and parent that there is likely to be a fun time that will happen mostly between parent and child.

Tactics to Collaborate with Parent

Tactic	Example
Observe and comment to provide detailed feedback about parent behavior	"Your questions about the lions really got her talking."
Observe and comment to provide detailed feedback about the child's response to parent behavior	"Wow! He just loves looking at the book with you! He will want to do that more."
Ask about the child and family interests and preferences	"What is your child interested in? What everyday things do you enjoy doing together?"
Ask about preferred activities	"Does your child like being more active or more quiet? Would you be more comfortable going to the park or just taking a walk around the neighborhood?"
Offer specific suggestions for ways to engage the child	"Maybe you could ask him why the lions are at the zoo."
Offer information about the program goals	"Most of our time will involve conversations between you and your child and making books together for you to keep."
Offer materials to the parent, *not* to the child	"Here are some markers you might want to use with him today to decorate the book cover."

Tactics to Involve Other Family Members

The SHELLS curriculum assumes that programs recognize family strengths and use resources families have. There is an emerging consensus that interventions that build on family strengths will have more lasting impacts. Family members who get involved in conversations and making books as part of the SHELLS curriculum activities will become better able to contribute, in an ongoing way, to the child's language and literacy development.

Key Assumption #4: The whole family can be involved in activities that help children learn. Children learn a lot of language from conversations they have with their parents. The SHELLS curriculum does not require extensive one-to-one time for the parent and child. Although one-to-one time is valuable for learning communication skills, in some families it is available only for very short periods of time. Children in large families with siblings and extended family members typically learn to communicate with everyone, without much private individual one-to-one interaction time. Parents may need help finding a little more of that valuable one-to-one-time, but they are likely to need as much or more help finding ways to involve other family members in activities that are good for their children's language development. Mothers are the typical "target parent" of the SHELLS curriculum, but fathers, siblings, and other family members can also be involved in ways that can promote the child's language and literacy development. What's more, the involvement of more family members is likely to be fun and to continue contributing to children's language development for long periods of time.

Use Key Strategy #1 to observe and comment on interactions of other family members with the child. You can encourage the involvement of other family members by noting any positive interactions, particularly verbal interactions, you observe the child having with other family members. If the family home includes several children along with two or more adults, frequent conversations could happen with any of these people. Children can learn a lot of language from conversations with their fathers, with their siblings if they have them, and with other people who are part of their family household.

Use Key Strategy #2 to ask for information about other family members. Who is important to the child? Who is around a lot? Everyone in a family is part of that family's strengths and resources. Anyone in the family who interacts regularly with a child can contribute to the child's development. When you invite everyone in the home to be involved in the SHELLS curriculum activities, the implication is that everyone in the home can help support the early language development of the children in the family.

Use Key Strategy #3 to offer information, as requested, on the potential impact of the father, siblings, or other family members on the child's language development. Not all mothers understand, much less appreciate, how sibling conflicts, for example, offer opportunities for learning to communicate and negotiate.

You can also offer information on language or literacy activities that are appropriate for a wide age range. The SHELLS curriculum includes activities that work for a wide age range of children and that are fun for all ages of family members. These kinds of activities are the most likely activities to be repeated after the parenting-focused program has ended. Activities that are

"open-ended" or have multiple ways of being involved, such as art activities and food preparation activities—both included in the SHELLS curriculum--are the most easily adapted to involve a variety of family members because everyone can readily do the behaviors required for these activities at their own developmental levels.

Tactics to Involve Other Family Members

Tactic	Example
Observe and comment on child responses to other family member	"Hey Dad, did you see how she turned toward you when you came into the room?"
Observe and comment on parent attempts to involve other family members	"Both of your children seem interested in what is going on. The way you explained what came next a bit differently to his brother seemed to help him understand what to do".
Ask about the child's "family"	"Who else plays or talks with him?"
Ask about times to include other family members	"Can we meet when his older brother is here?"
Ask about how child responds with different family members	"Does she talk more with Dad than Mom?"
Offer enough materials for everyone	"I have enough markers for everyone to draw pictures for the book."
Offer information about other family relationships	"Babies learn a lot of words from their older brothers and sisters."
Offer suggestions to other family members	"You can help by reading to your little brother."

How Do You Know If It Is Working?

The primary way that you will know if these tactics are working is that during your time together, the parents and children will be engaged with each other in conversations and in literacy activities that will continue even when you are not there. "Green Flags," listed in the box below, show that your tactics are successful.

"Green Flags"—Signs of Effectiveness

- Parent and child interact with each other during most of your visit.
- Child excitedly turns to the mother when you arrive, expecting to enjoy something together.
- You comment on several interactions you observe that support child language and literacy.
- Whatever family members are present during a visit are involved in the activities.
- Family shares things they have done, talked about, or made together between your visits.
- Parent says, "We talk more with each other since we started these activities."
- Parent says, "I enjoy doing these things with my child."

When you see Green Flags, these are signs that the tactics you are using are effectively getting parents involved in the SHELLS curriculum in ways that are likely to have lasting positive effects. By using these tactics you are succeeding at engaging parents and children in ways that support language and literacy development. Keep doing what's working!

We have also developed a home visit observation tool to go along with the SHELLS curriculum: the *SHELLS Home Visit Rating Scale*. Use this tool to rate how well you implement the curriculum. Check the behaviors you do on a home visit and use them to do an overall rating, from 1 to 7. You can use this tool to guide videotaped observations of your home visits, to guide peer or supervisor observations, or simply to reflect on your practices. The tool was adapted from the *Home Visit Rating Scales (*HOVRS; Roggman et al., 2008), which also include scales for parent-child interaction and parent and child engagement.

SHELLS HOME VISIT RATING SCALE
Implementation of curriculum activities and strategies

Inadequate 1	**2**	**Adequate 3**	**4**	**Good 5**	**6**	**Excellent 7**
Home Visitor:		**Home Visitor:**		**Home Visitor:**		**Home Visitor:**
___ does not ask any open-ended questions __asks questions from child or parent, but not both. __ interacts with parent or child, but not both. __ tells parent what to do without asking for parent input. __demonstrates "correct" strategies without being asked.		__ asks questions directly from curriculum materials. __ asks both child *and* parent about interests or experiences. __ interacts with both parent and child. __ asks "wh" question, "where and when did that happen?" __ asks for labels, "what's that?" __ provides positive feedback, "What a wonderful memory to share!" ___ asks for parent ideas __ provides book-making materials or constructed books.		__ asks new questions related to curriculum theme. __ asks parent about child interests. __ repeats or expands on what parent or child says. __ refers parent to child or child to parent, "ask him/her to tell you about that." __ cues parent to provide labels, "does he know what that is?" __cues turn-taking by prompting parent or child to wait for other's response. __ involves parent *and* child interacting together in activities. __ helps family make/ share books.		__ asks new open -ended or "wh" questions related to curriculum theme. __ prompts parent to ask child about interests to engage child in activity. __encourages parent to ask open-ended or "wh" questions. __ encourages parent to repeat and expand on what child says. __ emphasizes conversation about what child talks about. __ encourages elaboration by asking for more information about statements or photos. __ prompts narration, "What then? Tell me more." __ engages everyone present in activities. __ guides family interactions to make/share book.

Conclusion

The assumptions, strategies, and tactics suggested in this chapter suggest ways for delivering the SHELLS curriculum effectively and ways to evaluate your own effectiveness. You can use these assumptions, strategies, and tactics to maximize your effectiveness in using the SHELLS curriculum to help parents establish a pattern with their children that can continue to support language and literacy development for many years. Because many parents need appropriate information and useful ideas to provide a rich language and literacy environment, the content of the SHELLS curriculum will provide additional ideas and resources.

Section 2

Book Topics

Chapter 3: My Favorite Things

Theme

My Favorite Things: Parents encourage children to talk about their favorite things; parents describe favorite things in the same categories either now or when they were children.

Purpose

Children are fascinated by stories of their parents when they were young. These stories and conversations, compared with those on many other topics, are more readily shared in ways that encourage children's active participation. Most families value sharing memories and histories as a way to pass on family traditions and culture. Talking and writing about *My Favorite Things* is an easy, enjoyable theme that does not usually require a lot of probing, prompting, or knowledge of story sequencing. This theme is a useful one to start with because it helps you to get to know the families you are working with. The very nature of the topic allows for individualization and for meaningful conversation. Parents are naturally placed in the "expert role" as they are the ones who know what their children like and are most able to elicit the favorites from their children. Because of this, parents are usually able to take on this role and engage their children in conversation around the topics that they are interested in. The focus on the mothers' favorite things provides opportunities around family history, a topic important to many cultural groups.

Conversation Starters for Book: *My Favorite Things*

My Favorite Things is a theme that encourages communication between parents and their children. Children who are nonverbal or just learning to speak can communicate their favorites through single words, pointing, and other strategies they use or can be encouraged to use to communicate. The very nature of *My Favorite Things* ensures that children are interested in the topic which is likely to motivate them to learn related words, concepts, and principles. To encourage conversation, help parents and children communicate with each other instead of with the home visitor. Avoid an "interview" of the family about the topic. If the home visit is conducted as an interview with the home visitor asking parents about their favorite things and then the children about their favorite things, the home visitor may learn a lot about the family, but may have done little to encourage parents to ask their children questions the following day and listen to their responses. Also, if parents are telling the home visitor about their favorite things, the children may not be engaged and may not be listening or learning about what their parents like and dislike. In this scenario the home visitor may learn a lot about the family, but the family may not learn as much about each other as they could.

Several conversation starters are suggested below that encourage the parent to follow the child's lead to engage the child in a conversation about their favorite things.

Examples of Questions to Start a Conversation about My Favorite Things

Examples of parent questions	How to encourage parent
What is your favorite toy? What is your favorite song? What is your favorite book, or food, or animals?	What would Shari say were some of her favorite things?
What do you think were some of my favorite things when I was your age?	I wonder what Kade thinks you liked when you were his age?
What favorites should we include in our book?	How do you think Jenna would like to start?

The number of favorite things and parent and child talk will vary from family to family based on family interests and age of the child. Four and five year-old children may want to talk about six or even ten of their favorite things while younger children may only be interested in talking about or showing one or two of their favorite things.

Encouraging Parents

Once the conversation is started, there are several ways to support interesting and satisfying conversations about favorite things. The "Support" aspect of the S-A-E strategies is a helpful way for the parent to elicit the child's involvement. Table X.2 lists several strategies that can be used to encourage sharing of interests and stories to promote the parent-child relationship and children's language skills. Included are examples of how parents can support their children's language use and how home visitors can encourage the parents to support their children.

Strategies to Use to Promote Children's Conversation and Language Skills about My Favorite Things

Strategies	Examples of parent questions and comments	How to encourage parent
Support		
Engage the child.	What are some of your favorite toys?	I wonder what Shari likes to play with the most.
	Which one of your favorite toys should we include in your book?	Which of her favorites would she like to include in her book?
Follow the child's lead and allow child's active participation.	What would you like to do with it in the picture?	I wonder how she would like the toy to be in the picture.

Strategies	Examples of parent questions and comments	How to encourage parent
Take turns.	When I was little my favorite toy was a stuffed puppy. What is your favorite toy?	Do you think that Shari would say she liked the same toys as you when you were young?
Ask		
Ask for more information, opinions, and feelings using "WH" questions: Why? Where? How? Who?	Why is a giraffe your favorite animal? Where do giraffes live? How do giraffes get food?	Why do you think Shari likes giraffes best? What do you think she knows about where giraffes live and how they eat? Should we ask her?
Expand		
Expand on what child says.	*Child*: Doggie. *Parent*: Yes, he's a big dog who is excited to see you. *Child*: I already washed my hands today. *Parent*: Yes, you washed your hands before breakfast this morning, but you need to wash them again before lunch. You have been playing outside and we don't want the dirt on your hands to get in your mouth and make you sick.	Do you think she knows why her dog is licking her? Do you think she knows why you want her to wash her hands again?
Use new words.	I loved to play a harmonica when I was your age. Here, try shaking this tambourine.	I wonder if she knows the names of the things you played with when you were younger. Would it help to tell her what they are as you go along?
Bring in child's experiences.	Do you remember the Fourth of July parade? You were dancing when the band was marching and drumming on their drums. What did you like about the parade?	When has she listened to people play musical instruments?

Creating a Meaningful Book

As much as possible, help the parent take photos of the child with favorite things or doing favorite activities. Some children may be very motivated to take photos of their favorite things with their mothers' help. Sometimes, taking a photo of a child engaging in a specific activity is not feasible at a certain time. In such cases, you may either have the parent and/or child pose for a photo with something that reminds them of the activity, or plan the next home visit around the activity. For example, you may want to plan the next visit to be at the park if the child's favorite

thing to do during the day is to play at the park, but meanwhile it might be possible to take a photo of the child wearing clothes they would wear to the park or holding a ball or toy they would take to the park. Help the parent and child figure out alternative ways to illustrate the book. Favorite things that are not easy to take pictures of could be included in the book as drawings, pictures from newspapers, or words. The flexibility of this topic for the illustrations in the book provides many opportunities for individualization.

Supporting Language and Literacy Learning

Your observation of the bookmaking process and your discussion with the parent to evaluate the activity will help you build on family interests as you suggest additional language and literacy activities. Increasing the amount of child-directed conversation around child and parent interests can add to their relationship as they learn more about each other and significantly increase the quantity and complexity of language the child is exposed to.

By discussing the following evaluation questions with the parent, you can help identify opportunities for ongoing conversations about what family members like and what they dislike. Use this discussion to encourage meaningful family conversation about favorite (or "unfavorite") things. The following questions will also help you, the parent, and the child think of more ideas to use this topic for supporting language and literacy.

Evaluation Questions
1. **See:** What happened here? 2. **Like:** What did you like? 3. **Add:** What could be added? 4. **Change:** What could be done differently? 5. **Plan:** What will we do?

Brainstorm other ideas to extend the conversation about favorite things to other everyday activities. Talking about the favorite things of family members and friends can provide opportunities for beginning to understand others' perspectives. For additional activities, see the examples provided in the following table. This table lists language and literacy-based activities and strategies related to the topic of *My Favorite Things*. These activities and strategies are linked to important developmental domains in the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework.

Activities Related to "My Favorite Things" to Promote Children's Conversation, Language Skills, and Other Important Head Start Outcomes

Domain/domain element	Activities to facilitate domain specific skills
Language development	
Listening and understanding	Listen to stories and memories of others and learn about parent as a child. Practice new vocabulary that is introduced specific to the recipe or food preparation process.

Domain/domain element	Activities to facilitate domain specific skills
Speaking and communication	Respond to questions, ask questions, and practice new words related to family members' likes and dislikes.
Literacy	
Phonological awareness	Name the first letter of the favorite things included in the book and repeat the sound of those letters.
Book knowledge and appreciation	Use the book to "read" about favorite things.
	Practice prediction by discussing questions such as, "What would happen if we didn't bake this. How would it taste?" Or "What if we used salt instead of sugar?"
	Read additional books about favorite things such as *The Very Hungry Caterpillar, Peter's Chair,* or *Olivia and the Missing Toy,* or tell a folktale, such as the *The Three Bears*.
Print awareness and concepts	Ask family members to write down their favorite foods, songs, movies, or toys. Compile a list of favorites to reinforce the usefulness of print, and when possible, have a picture of the item to help the child "read" the word.
Early writing	Write a Christmas wish list or a grocery list of ingredients for a favorite dinner, using pictures of the items in the wish list or the grocery list to help the child link the picture to the written word.
Alphabet knowledge	Identify name on the title page of a favorite book and the first letter of each of the favorites in the book.
Mathematics	
Number and operations	Count the number of favorite toys. Select three of the most favorite toys from the group.
Geometry and spatial sense	Pack a small bag with favorite clothes to go on a pretend trip. Discuss how many clothes and shoes will fit in the bag. Try different approaches to getting as much in the bag as possible.
Patterns and measurement	Arrange favorite foods or toys in order from the most favorite to the least favorite and largest to smallest.
Science	
Scientific skills and methods	Discuss where favorite toys come from and what is unique or interesting about them. Examine how the toys work (what makes the car roll forward, why is the stuffed animal so soft).
Scientific knowledge	Talk about how the favorite toys were made.
	Make a musical instrument or toy from household materials.
Creative arts	
Music	Sing favorite songs or a song about a favorite thing. Make up a song about favorite things.
Art	Draw pictures for the book.

Domain/domain element	Activities to facilitate domain specific skills
Movement	Explore different ways to move across the room (skip, run, jump, crabwalk). Talk about which ways are the most fun, hardest, and fastest. Then talk about the child's favorite way to move.
Dramatic play	Pretend to be favorite animals playing together.
Social and emotional development	
Self-concept	Discuss likes and dislikes. This topic may encourage a conversation and even a book about *least* favorite things.
	Try out others' favorite foods, games, songs, or toys.
Self-control	Wait for turn to discuss and play with favorite things.
Cooperation	Take turns playing with favorite toys or make a favorite food together.
Social relationships	Talk about what other family members, friends, or even strangers like to encourage the ability to understand others' perspectives.
Knowledge of families and communities	Find out what immediate and extended family members like to eat, to read, and to play to encourage cohesiveness and understanding.
Approaches to learning	
Initiative and curiosity	Ask questions about favorite things and follow the questions with more questions to understand why.
Engagement and persistence	Focus on a complex task such as a favorite puzzle or game to completion.
Reasoning and problem solving	Explore how favorite toys work and what they are made of.
Physical health and development	
Fine motor skills	Draw pictures and write names of favorite things.
Gross motor skills	Play favorite games that involve large motor skills such as hide-and-seek, mother may I, and duck, duck, goose.
Health status and practices	Exercise through playing favorite games. Identify favorite foods that are also healthy.

Chapter 4: My Family

Theme

My Family: Parents encourage children to identify and talk about members of their family.

Purpose

Children treasure their families and love to tell others about them. Families provide children with an identity, history, and sense of belonging. Children know a lot about the people in their families and are interested in where they go, what they do, and what they like. Families can be large or small and include siblings, grandparents, and others who are important in children's lives, even pets. Whoever is included in a child's family can be incorporated into a story book about the child's family. As part of making the book, children can be counting, describing, retelling, thinking from others' perspectives, recognizing similarities and differences, and questioning. Parents are likely to be engaged throughout the home visit, because they also are likely to enjoy discussing and hearing about their families.

Conversation Starters for Book: *My Family*

My Family is a theme that will generate topics that can vary widely in breadth and diversity depending on each family's situation and interests. Young children or children with limited language development may want to focus on their immediate family, their pet, or their favorite sibling. Older children may want to include extended family members in their book. When children don't know what to say about a family member or pet, parents can use their knowledge about the relationships involved to ask probing questions. Parents can direct the conversation around fond memories or certain characteristics of family members. Several conversation starters are suggested below that encourage the parent to follow the child's lead to engage the child in a conversation about their family.

Examples of Questions to Start a Conversation about My Favorite Things

Examples of parent questions	How to encourage parent
Who is in your family?	Who would Whitney say is in her family?
What do you like to do with your grandpa?	I wonder what Donavon would say he likes to do with his grandpa?
What does your sister do every day?	How much does George know about what each family member does during the day?

The number of family members that parents and their children talk about will vary from family to family based on the family situation and age of the child. Four- and five-year-old children may want to talk about six or even ten of their family members while younger children may only be interested in talking about one or two of them. Children and parents may or may not want to talk about certain family members. Following their lead without asking direct questions about specific family members will ensure that the conversation is engaging and comfortable whatever the family situation might be.

Encouraging Parents

Once the conversation is started, there are several ways to encourage interesting and satisfying conversations about families. The "Support" aspect of the S-A-E strategies is a helpful way for the parent to elicit the child's involvement. The following table lists several strategies that can be used to encourage sharing of interests and stories to promote the parent-child relationship and children's language skills. Included are examples of how parents can support their children's language use and how home visitors can encourage the parents to support their children.

Strategies to Use to Promote Children's Conversation and Language Skills about My Family

Strategies	Examples of parent questions and comments	How to encourage parent
Support		
Engage the child.	What do you like to do with your brother?	I wonder what Chase likes to do with his big brother?
	How should we include him in your book?	How would he like to include him in his book?
Follow the child's lead and allow child's active participation.	What would you like your sister and brother to be doing in their pictures?	I wonder what she would like her family members to be doing in the picture.
Take turns.	I had two big brothers who always teased me and a grandmother living with me when I was your age. Who lives with you?	Do you think that Troy knows how your family growing up might be similar or different to his family?
Ask		
Ask for more information, opinions, and feelings using "WH" questions: Why? Where? How? Who?	Why is Teresa your favorite sister? Where does Dad go to work? Why does Dad go to work?	Why do you think she likes Teresa best? See if she knows where her Dad works and why he goes to work everyday?
Expand		
Expand on what child says.	*Child*: Addie always takes my toys.	Do you think she knows why Addie keeps taking her toys even

Strategies	Examples of parent questions and comments	How to encourage parent
	Parent: Yes, Addie doesn't understand that you don't want her to play with your toys. She is too little. Look how she pays attention to you when you talk to her. You are helping her to figure it out.	when she has told her not to?
	Child: No, no. *Parent*: No, cat. Get off the table.	Do you think he knows how to use "no" in different situations?
Use new words.	Your grandmother used to be a nurse's aide at the nursing home. She would help elderly people get dressed and go for walks.	I wonder if she knows what some of her family members do for a living.
	She was born in the Philippines.	Would she be interested in knowing where her grandparents lived when they were young?
Bring in child's experiences.	Do you remember what happened when we were walking home from church yesterday? You were running ahead and your sister tried to catch you. What did your sister do to help you when you fell?	How do her family members help her when she needs help?

Creating a Meaningful Book

You may find that photographing all of the members of the family is not feasible at a certain time. In such cases, you may ask the parent if she has a picture she'd like to use in the book, or schedule the next home visit for when the missing member will be home. As much as possible, help the parent take photos of the child with family members. Books about family members can easily turn into photo albums or scrapbooks. To encourage language development, it is important to encourage discussion beyond simply pointing and naming family members. Help the parent and child figure out alternative ways to illustrate the book. Family members who are not easy to take pictures of could be included in the book as drawings or represented by pictures of things they like. Encourage a story line, or narrative, that expands from simply naming family members to telling about them in a sequence of related statements. To create a lasting treasure, write the children's own words, whether simple or elaborate, about their memories and feelings about family members.

Supporting Language and Literacy Learning

Your observation of the bookmaking process and your discussion with the parent to evaluate the activity will help you build on family interests as you suggest additional language and literacy activities. Increasing the amount of child-directed conversation in the family can enrich their

relationships as they learn more about each other and can significantly increase the quantity and complexity of language in the child's everyday environment.

By discussing the following evaluation questions with the parent, you can help identify opportunities for ongoing conversations about family members, what they do, where they go, what they like, and what they dislike. Use this discussion to encourage meaningful family conversation about families. The following questions will also help you, the parent, and the child think of more ways to use this topic for supporting language and literacy.

Evaluation Questions
1. **See:** What happened here? 2. **Like:** What did you like? 3. **Add:** What could be added? 4. **Change:** What could be done differently? 5. **Plan:** What will we do?

Brainstorm other ideas to extend the conversation and activities around family members. Siblings, grandparents, parents, and pets are priceless resources for children's learning and development. For additional activities, see the examples provided in the following table. This table lists language and literacy-based activities and strategies related to the topic of *My Family*. These activities and strategies are linked to important developmental domains in the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework.

Activities Related to "My Family" to Promote Children's Conversation, Language Skills, and Other Important Head Start Outcomes

Domain/domain element	Activities to facilitate domain specific skills
Language development	
Listening and understanding	Listen to stories and memories of others. Describe your memory of the same experience. Discuss differences and similarities of views.
	Practice new vocabulary that is introduced specific to occupations, interests, and family background.
Speaking and communication	Respond to questions, ask questions, and practice new words related to how family members are the same and different.
Literacy	
Phonological awareness	Name the first letter of the names of the family members included in the book and repeat the sound of those letters.
Book knowledge and appreciation	"Read" the book to your family members.
	Read additional books about families such as *Are You My Mother? The Best Father of All* or *In My Family/En mi familia*, or tell a folktale, such as *The Three Little Pigs, or The Three Billy Goats Gruff*.
Print awareness and concepts	Identify family members' names throughout the house, on mail, and on school papers.

Domain/domain element	Activities to facilitate domain specific skills
Early writing	Interview a family member about what they like to eat, or activities they enjoy. Write down the foods/activities or draw pictures of the foods/activities.
Alphabet knowledge	Identify names on the title page of *My Family* and the first letter of each of the family members in the book. Look in other books and newspapers for the letters that family members' names start with.
Mathematics	
Number and operations	Count the total number of people in your family. Then, count the number of children, adults, and animals.
Geometry and spatial sense	See how many of your family members will fit under the table, in a closet, or on the couch.
Patterns and measurement	Arrange family members in order by age, height, shirt color, or hair color.
Science	
Scientific skills and methods	Discuss how family members are different and how they are the same. Make a snowman, rake leaves, or plant flowers as a family. Observe and discuss the changes in nature.
Scientific knowledge	Take care of a pet or learn about taking care of a pet. Talk about animal and human families. How are they similar, how are they different?
Creative arts	
Music	Sing songs about families or make up a song about your family.
Art	Draw pictures of family members for the book or for cards that can be given to family members.
Movement	Crawl like a baby, dance with your sister or brother, do yard or house work with your family. Talk about the way that all of the family members move when they are in a hurry or when they are having fun.
Dramatic play	Play house. Let the child assign roles.
Social and emotional development	
Self-concept	Share family stories to help build family history, follow and create traditions, discuss names and what they mean. Discuss what being a family member means.
Self-control	Share with family members, listen to other family members, and wait your turn for the bathroom and the ice cream. Use your words to communicate when a sibling or parent frustrates you.
Cooperation	Make a favorite meal, clean a closet, or play a game together as a family.
Social relationships	Practice conflict-resolution, invite others to join in play, and express your feelings and needs to parents and siblings.

Domain/domain element	Activities to facilitate domain specific skills
Knowledge of families and communities	Look at pictures or talk on the phone to extended family members who live out of the area.
Approaches to learning	
Initiative and curiosity	Find out something you didn't know about each family member. Find out about friends' families. How are they similar and different?
Engagement and persistence	Help a parent or sibling with one of their tasks that seems a bit hard.
Reasoning and problem solving	Figure out how to get a drink, make a snack, feed the dog, or sort the laundry by yourself. Talk about ways to get along with siblings.
Physical health and development	
Fine motor skills	Draw pictures and write names of family members.
Gross motor skills	Help family members with household chores such as vacuuming, sweeping, picking up toys, and setting the table for dinner.
Health status and practices	Talk about what our bodies need to grow. Discuss how some things help to strengthen our bodies and some things wear our bodies down.

Chapter 5: Making My Favorite Foods

Theme

Making My Favorite Foods: Parent and child talk about their favorite foods, select one to make, and plan how they will make it. Then, parent and child make the food together, talk about how they are making it, and create a book about the experience from their written words and illustrations.

Purpose

Parents often spend much of their time at home doing chores such as cooking, laundry, yard work, and cleaning. These chores can be rich opportunities for conversation, companionship, and skill development. *Making My Favorite Foods* is a simple theme that children enjoy because it gives them the opportunity to create their favorite foods with their parents. Making food is a daily activity for most families and particularly interesting and meaningful to young children. Talking about favorite foods, making favorite foods, and making a book about the process will help parents to:

- Involve children in everyday activities that encourage self-help skills, contribute to the family well-being, and provide opportunities for close proximity and conversation.
- Share memories and stories about their family's favorite foods and food traditions.
- Teach the importance of healthy eating and kitchen safety.
- Help their children learn new vocabulary words.
- Provide background knowledge about food and cooking processes.
- Highlight math concepts and math tasks involved in making food.
- Involve their children in everyday science to build vocabulary and background knowledge.
- Identify and overcome barriers to involving children in kitchen-related tasks.
- Return to this conversation and activity regularly with their children.

Parents can become more aware of the importance of everyday household tasks to help their child learn in fun and meaningful ways as they engage in this activity and bookmaking process. Taking pictures during the process and using them in a book will help the child remember and retell the experience and will provide additional opportunities for learning.

This topic demands individualization, because families vary in their food preferences. Food preparation is a daily activity for most families, so it is a natural activity for a child's learning. Parents are the "experts" because they know how to make food their children like. Some parents are reluctant to have children involved in food preparation activities, but learning about the parent's hesitancy can help decrease the barrier. Parents concerned about safety (for the food or the children) may need help planning safe ways to involve children and teach them safety rules. Parents concerned about time efficiency may need help planning simple ways to involve children

without slowing down the process too much. Supporting a parent in this experience instead of leading the activity will allow the parent to work within their comfort zone. Feeling comfortable contributes to parents' and children's overall enjoyment of the activity and the likelihood that they will repeat the activity in the future. Capturing a food preparation experience in a book will provide an engaging, familiar, and meaningful literacy resource for the child and parent.

Conversation Starters for Book: *Making My Favorite Foods*

Cooking My Favorite Foods is a theme that encourages interaction between parent and child. Eating preferences are typically an important part of a young child's life. Sometimes negotiating what and when to eat can result in conflict. The support aspect of the S-A-E strategies is a helpful way to help the parent elicit the child's involvement. The activity is likely to be engaging if the child is interested in the food and the mother is comfortable with the process. Several conversation starters are suggested below that encourage following the child's lead if a parent needs support in discussing the activity with their child.

Examples of Questions to Start a Conversation about the Child's Favorite Food

Examples of parent questions	How to encourage parent
What are some of your favorite foods that might be fun for us to make?	What foods do you think Jordan might like to make with you?
How do you make your favorite food?	I wonder what Jordan knows about how to make his favorite food.
How should we get started?	How do you think Jordan would like to start?
What is in your favorite food?	What ingredients does Jordan think go into making his favorite food?

The foods the parent and child decide to make will vary in complexity from family to family. This will be based on child preferences, child age, and family diet, and parents' level of comfort with involving children in food preparation. Four- and five-year-old children may be able to make a more complex dish than younger children who may be interested for only a short period of time. Encourage the parent to follow the child's lead and keep the conversation going throughout the process of making the food to facilitate language growth.

Encouraging Parents

Once the conversation is started, there are several ways to support interesting and satisfying conversations about making food. The "Support" aspect of the S-A-E strategies is a helpful way for the parent to elicit the child's involvement. The following table lists several strategies that can be used during the food preparation process to promote children's conversation and language skills. Included are examples of how parents can support their children's language use and how home visitors can encourage parents to support their children.

Strategies to Use During Food Preparation to Promote Children's Conversation and Language Skills

Strategies	Examples of parent questions and comments	How to encourage parent
Support		
Engage the child.	What are your favorite foods? Which one of your favorite foods should we make? How should we get started?	I wonder what Jake likes to eat. What would he like to make with you?
Follow the child's lead and allow child's active participation.	How does the flour feel in your hands? Do you like the feel of flour in your hands?	I wonder what he is thinking.
Take turns.	I like scrambled eggs for breakfast. What do you like?	Do you think that Jake would say he liked the same things as you do for breakfast?
Ask		
Ask for more information, opinions, and feelings using "WH" questions: Why? Where? How? Who?	What do you like about this food? When do you like to eat it? How should we make it?	Why do you think Jake likes that? What do you think he knows about how you make it? Should we ask him?
Expand		
Expand on what child says.	*Child*: "Hot." *Parent*: "Yes, the stove is hot. It's hot so the food will cook." *Child*: "I want to put more in." *Parent*: "You want to put more in? If we kept putting more salt in then it wouldn't taste right. It would be too salty. Here, taste a little."	Do you think he knows why the stove is hot? Do you think he knows why you don't want him to keep adding in more salt?
Use new words.	Here are three eggs. Here, try stirring with the whisk.	I wonder if she knows the names of the things you will be using. Would it help to tell her what they are as you go along?
Bring in child's experiences.	I loved those blueberry pancakes that grandma made. Do you remember those? What did you like about that breakfast?	What do you think he remembers about the last time he had pancakes?

Creating a Meaningful Book

Ask the parent for suggestions of pictures to take of the child and/or other family members making the food. Making a favorite food together while having photographs taken and words written about the experience will enhance the experience and provide text and illustrations for a book that will be valuable to both the child and the family. Parents may want to include the recipe in the book or their children's version of the recipe. Taking photographs or drawing pictures of the steps involved in the making the food will help the child understand sequence and order using an activity relevant to him.

Consider using the photographs to illustrate a recipe. Alternatively, use the photographs to actually represent the recipe by taking photographs of the exact amounts of ingredients needed, in the order in which they are used, with the required actions to make the food.

Supporting Language and Literacy Learning

Your observation of the bookmaking process and your discussion with the parent to evaluate the activity will help you build on family interests as you suggest additional language and literacy activities. Increasing the amount of child-directed conversation during daily chores can significantly increase the quantity and complexity of language the child is exposed to. By discussing the following evaluation questions with the parent, you can help identify barriers and opportunities for involving children in cooking and other daily chores. Discussing these questions will also help you, the parent, and the child think of more ideas to use this topic for supporting language and literacy.

Evaluation Questions
6. **See:** What happened here? 7. **Like:** What did you like? 8. **Add:** What could be added? 9. **Change:** What could be done differently? 10. **Plan:** What will we do?

Brainstorm other ideas to extend the conversation about foods to other everyday activities. Talking about cooking favorite foods together is a wonderful steppingstone into other activities the child engages in, and opens up opportunities for additional activities such as the examples provided in the table below. This table lists language and literacy-based activities and strategies related to the topic of *Making My Favorite Foods*. These activities and strategies are linked to important developmental domains in the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework.

Activities Related to "Making My Favorite Food" to Promote Children's Conversation, Language Skills, and Other Important Head Start Outcomes

Domain/domain element	Activities to facilitate domain specific skills
Language development	
Listening and understanding	Follow the steps and directions outlined in the process of making the favorite food.
	Practice new vocabulary that is introduced specific to the recipe or food preparation process.
Speaking and communication	Respond to questions, ask questions, and practice new words related to food and cooking.
Literacy	
Phonological awareness	Sing the "I Like to Eat" song to practice distinguishing between the vowel sounds.
Book knowledge and appreciation	Use the book to "read" about the experience.
	Practice prediction by discussing questions such as, "What would happen if we didn't bake this? How would it taste?" Or "What if we used salt instead of sugar?"
	Read additional books about foods such as *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* or *Give a Mouse a Cookie,* or tell a folktale, such as the *Little Red Hen*.
Print awareness and concepts	Follow along with different recipes throughout the week to increase understanding of how print is used to identify ingredients and explain the process for putting the ingredients together. Discuss sequencing questions like, "What comes next?"
Early writing	Create drawings and write descriptions of what happened in the pictures for the book. Provide a narration for the pictures and a recipe to demonstrate the usefulness of print.
Alphabet knowledge	Identify name on the title page of the book and match words from the ingredients or recipe to words written in the book.
Mathematics	
Number and operations	Count eggs, scoops of flour, or other ingredients. Talk about how many more are needed.
Geometry and spatial sense	Talk about the types of containers that you put the ingredients in and what happens (the liquid goes really high in one container and not very high in a different one).
Patterns and measurement	Measure the ingredients using standard tools such as a teaspoon as well as nonstandard tools such as a "pinch."
Science	
Scientific skills and methods	Discuss what will happen next in the cooking, mixing, or cooling process. Talk about what would happen if you didn't crack the egg or didn't set the timer. Relate these discussions to past cooking experiences.

Domain/domain element	Activities to facilitate domain specific skills
Scientific knowledge	Talk about where the food came from.
	Plant a garden.
	Discuss and observe the physical changes that materials undergo (ice freezing, eggs frying, mold growing, pudding getting thick).
Creative arts	
Music	Sing songs about foods.
Art	Draw pictures for the book.
Movement	Talk about what happens when the mixer is on high and when it is on low. Have the child look at how fast the liquid moves when it is being poured versus how quickly the flour or egg moves. Have the child imitate the quickness of the movements.
Dramatic play	Engage in pretend play around food preparation with child.
Social and emotional development	
Self-concept	Actively participate in the important daily activity of preparing meals.
	Explore unfamiliar and interesting foods.
Self-control	Follow rules to be safe around equipment that could be dangerous (i.e., stove, mixer, knives, hot water).
Cooperation	Take turns, wait for something to bake, and help each other with unpleasant tasks like clean up.
Social relationships	Discuss where the recipe came from, who else in the family likes this food, traditions associated with different foods, how preparing food helps the family, and other topics that highlight connections in family relationships. Express appreciation for help with food preparation and clean-up.
Knowledge of families and communities	Talk about what other people like to eat to understand others' perspectives and differences compared with other families and cultures.
Approaches to learning	
Initiative and curiosity	Make a choice and follow a task to completion. Ask questions and follow the questions with more questions.
	Discuss where different foods come from and how they are prepared. Ask challenging questions that require creative responses from your child.
Engagement and persistence	Focus on a complex task that involves many different directions/ instructions.
Reasoning and problem solving	Explore and engage in rich conversation around new topics and complex processes. For example, ask your child what would happen if you didn't eat or drink for some time, or questions about the food chain.
Physical health and development	
Fine motor skills	Stir, whip, pour, measure, cut, chop, spread, draw, and write.

Domain/domain element	Activities to facilitate domain specific skills
Gross motor skills	Mix the food with a spoon and then an electric mixer. Compare the differences. Balance, pour, stir, knead, and move from place to place in the kitchen.
Health status and practices	Practice hand washing, demonstrate safe food handling, and discuss healthy foods.

Here are some additional books about this topic that are available in most bookstores and libraries:

The Little Red Hen by Paul Galdone
If you Give a Pig a Pancake by Laura Joffe Numeroff and Felicia Bond
If you Give a Mouse a Cookie by Laura Joffe Numeroff and Felicia Bond
The Very Hungry Caterpillar by Eric Carle
Blueberries for Sal by Robert McCloskey
The Carrot Seed by Ruth Krauss
Ice Cream Larry by Daniel Manus Pinkwater
In My Momma's Kitchen by Jerdine Nolen
The Popcorn Book by Tomie dePaola
Strega Nona by Tomie dePaola
The Tortilla Factory by Gary Paulsen
The Ugly Vegetables by Grace Lin

Chapter 6: My Day

Theme

My Day: Parent and child talk about the child's daily routine, including activities during the whole day or a certain part of the day. The parent and child choose what parts of the day to include in a book, illustrate each activity with a photograph or drawing, write words about each activity, and create a book about the child's day.

Purpose

Routines help children understand their world. Young children do not comprehend the concept of time so a routine can help them keep track of the daily order of events. Routines also help children feel secure by knowing what will happen next. Talking about the daily routine of a child is one way to help them learn about sequencing (the order of things). Sequencing is an important skill for later reading comprehension and writing ability. It will also help children with math skills as they think about the logical order of events or objects. Certain parts of the day may be difficult for some children at certain ages such as going to bed at night or being dropped off at a babysitter or child care center. Making a book and talking about these stressful times may help ease the transition and reduce parents' and children's stress.

Creating a book about routines will help the family in various ways. Talking about the importance of daily routines for children may help parents understand the importance of providing predictable routines. Establishing routines also helps reduce stress for both children and parents. All children wake up, eat, and go to sleep again every day. Many children also run errands, visit family, play with friends, help with chores, go for walks, and attend preschool. Talking about these and other events throughout the day provides opportunities to move beyond the simple daily commands such as: eat your breakfast, brush your teeth, and get your coat. These conversations become more complex as you talk about why we eat our breakfasts, how we brush our teeth, and when we wear our coats. Talking about what children do and don't like about these daily activities can also provide opportunities to talk about undesirable behaviors and conflicts.

Discussing the daily routine of the child and making a book about their day will help parents to:

- Understand the importance of routines in helping children feel secure.
- Assist their children in following routines.
- Help their children understand the importance of their daily actions.
- Introduce their children to concepts of time and sequence.
- Discuss parts of the day that may be difficult or stressful such as bedtime or toileting.

Conversation Starters for Book: *My Day*

The topic of *My Day* provides an excellent opportunity for children to be experts. Often children's viewpoints are different than adults'. Parents may have a very different interpretation of their children's schedule, but the child's interpretation is important for making the book engaging and meaningful as a literacy resource for the child. Any disagreement about routines and what they mean may offer an opportunity for parents and children to talk about their daily routines and how to make the routines easier for both of them.

Examples of Questions to Start a Conversation about the Child's Day

Examples of parent questions	How to encourage parent
What do you do every day?	How would Megan describe her day?
What is your favorite part of the day?	What would Megan say is her favorite part of the day?
What is your least favorite part of the day? What don't you like to do each day?	What would Megan say is her least favorite part of the day?
What do you do before you go to sleep every night?	How would Megan describe what she does before going to sleep at night?

The daily routine, or parts of the day, that parents and children choose to discuss and include as illustrations will vary in complexity from family to family. Conversations and illustrations with young children may focus on simple daily activities. Preschool age children's conversation may also include feelings, relationships, background knowledge, understanding of processes and events, and other more complex aspects of their daily routine. Encourage parents to follow their children's lead and talk about parts of the day that interest their children to facilitate language growth regardless of children's ability.

Encouraging Parents

It is important to support parents and their children in this activity. Encourage conversations between parent and child about what they do during a day. These conversations will help build the child's background knowledge, vocabulary, social skills, and emotional awareness. This may be especially helpful for reducing conflict, promoting cooperation and self-control, and increasing children's knowledge of time and sequence.

The "Support" aspect of the S-A-E strategies is a helpful way for the parent to elicit the child's involvement. The following table lists several strategies that can be used to encourage sharing of interests, information, and stories to promote the parent-child relationship and children's language skills. Included are examples of how parents can support their children's language use and how home visitors can encourage parents to support their children.

Strategies to Use to Promote Child Language, Cognitive, and Social-Emotional Skills

Strategies	Examples of Parent Questions and Comments	How to Encourage Parent
Support		
Engage the child.	We are going to make a book together about the things you do every day! What do you do when you wake up? What happens next? Show me where you sleep. That's where you start your day.	How can we get Rosa to talk about what she does every day?
Follow the child's lead and allow child's active participation.	Should we play a game about what you do every day, and take pictures of you doing it?	Which pictures do you think Rosa would like to take for this book? Do you think she'd like to pretend play that she's waking up or eating breakfast?
Take turns.	*Parent:* "What is your favorite part of the day?" *Child:* "I don't know." *Parent:* "My favorite part is when I curl up with you at night and read you a story before you go to sleep. What do you like to do during the day?" *Child:* "Play outside." *Parent:* "What do you like to do when you are outside?"	Do you think that you and Rosa would have the same favorite and least favorite activities during the day?
Ask		
Ask for more information, opinions, and feelings using "WH" questions: Why? Where? How? Who?	What is the first thing you do every day? Why do you do it? You go to preschool most days. What happens while you are there?	What would Rosa say is the first thing she does every day? Can you get her to tell you more about her day? What does she do?
Expand		
Expand on what child says.	*Child:* "I go to sleep after my bath every night." *Parent:* "Yes, you do. But first we put on lotion and I play 'This little piggy' with you, and then you brush your teeth. Why do you brush your teeth?"	What things would she say she does every day? Could you help her think about the details of that a little more? Does she know why it is important to brush teeth? Do you know why it is important to play "little piggy"?

Strategies	Examples of Parent Questions and Comments	How to Encourage Parent
Use new words.	This is the alarm clock that wakes me up every day. It is very loud, and I usually turn it off three times before I get out of bed. I'm usually really tired in the morning. Should we listen to it together?	Does she know what an alarm clock is? Maybe you could show her yours and tell her about it.
Bring in child's experiences.	Do you remember the day we went to grandma's house and she did everything different than the way we do it? What did you like about our visit to Grandma's? What didn't you like?	Has there ever been a time when her schedule was a little different? Could you ask her about that?

Creating a Meaningful Book

Ask the parent for suggestions of pictures to take of the child or family members engaged in their daily activities. Having photographs taken and words written about a child's day will document a piece of the child's history that will be valuable to the child and the family. Parents may want to add in pages with dialogue between parent and child about the daily routine and the reason for a particular daily activity. For example, the parent could explain that the child goes to the babysitter because the parent needs to work in order to buy groceries and heat their house in the winter.

Following a sequence is easy with this book topic because children have so much experience with the ordering of their day. Supporting parents to encourage their children to arrange the pictures in order of the activities during the day will provide a meaningful activity to practice sequencing. Helping children number the pages gives them more experience with numbers, numerals, and the sequencing implicit in the number system.

Supporting Language and Literacy Learning

Your observation of the bookmaking process and your discussion with the parent to evaluate the activity will help you build on family interests as you suggest additional language and literacy activities. By increasing the amount of child-directed conversation during daily activities, parents can significantly increase the quantity and complexity of language and literacy materials the child is exposed to. By discussing the following evaluation questions with the parent, you can help identify daily activities that are enjoyable and those that are often difficult. Both are opportunities for rich conversations that are individualized, engaging, and relevant to children and therefore likely to increase their vocabulary, background knowledge, and ability to make inferences. Discussing these questions will also help you, the parent, and the child think of more ideas to use this topic for supporting language and literacy.

Evaluation questions
1. **See:** What happened here? 2. **Like:** What did you like? 3. **Add:** What could be added? 4. **Change:** What could be done differently? 5. **Plan:** What will we do?

Brainstorm other ideas to extend the conversation about a child's day to other daily activities. Talking about daily routines is a wonderful stepping stone into other regular activities the child engages in and opens up opportunities for additional activities such as the examples provided in the table below. The following table lists activities and strategies related to the *My Day* topic and links these activities and strategies to developmental domains included in the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework.

Activities Related to "My Day" to Promote Children's Conversation, Language Skills, and Other Important Head Start Outcomes

Domain/domain element	Activities to facilitate domain specific skills
Language development	
Listening and understanding	Talk throughout the day about whatever is going on. Ask "how" and "why" about daily activities.
Speaking and communication	Play games that put pictures of daily activities in order and tell stories about the routines.
Literacy	
Phonological awareness	Play with alliteration by using labels for daily activities that have the same initial sound—breakfast, bath, bedtime, etc.
Book knowledge and appreciation	Share books such as "Good Night Moon" or "Diary of a Wombat" and talk about the different routines people have.
Print awareness and concepts	Describe the events of the day and have them written in the book. Respond to sequencing questions like, "What comes next?" "And then what?"
Early writing	List the day using either drawings to represent events or actions (such as waking up) or letters that approximate the words. Let the child write about daily routine events and have the parent write what the child says she wrote.
Alphabet knowledge	Watch for letters and words that help people know where to go and what to do. For example, point out the doctor's name on the door of the office before going in for an appointment. Highlight similar letters to letters in your child's name.
Mathematics	
Number and operations	Count events throughout the day such as how many times the family eats a meal during the day or how many times they ride in the car.

Domain/domain element	Activities to facilitate domain specific skills
Geometry and spatial sense	Draw a room in the house that represents the space and objects in the room such as a bedroom including the bed, dresser, and toy box. Talk about where each activity of a routine happens.
Patterns and measurement	Talk about events or activities that repeat during the day or events/activities that happen at the same time every day. Count how many steps it takes to get from the bed in the morning to the kitchen. Measure the distance with a measuring tape and compare the two measures.
Science	
Scientific skills and methods	Be a scientist and discuss and examine the why and how of daily events. For example, what happens if the milk is left out on the counter, or what happens to the water in the ice cube trays when they are put in the freezer.
Scientific knowledge	Talk about why our bodies need to eat and sleep. Talk about day and night and how the earth revolves around the sun.
Creative arts	
Music	Sing songs associated with daily events such as clean-up songs, lullabies, "If you're happy and you know it," or sing songs as you do chores.
Art	Draw pictures of the family during a favorite daily routine.
Movement	Do routine activities differently like hopping on one foot to the table, crawling to the bedroom, or rolling to pick up the toys.
Dramatic play	Play house and reverse roles.
Social and emotional development	
Self-concept	Help children understand their routines and feel successful and secure in them, so they develop a sense of control over their lives.
Self-control	Make a book about transitions or events that are difficult such as going to bed, shopping, sitting in the car seat, sharing toys, cleaning up toys, or waiting for a turn. Discuss why these times are difficult and work on strategies to make improvements.
Cooperation	Develop a checklist of chores that can be marked when they are completed. Pictures/drawings of chores can be used as well as words.
Social relationships	Discuss who is important when during the day and how routines can help everyone get along with each other.
Knowledge of families and communities	Go to different places in the community that are part of the parents' daily routines such as their place of work, market, or friends' homes.
Approaches to learning	
Initiative and curiosity	Think about other people and how their routines might be similar or different.
Engagement and persistence	Discuss activities that are easy or difficult for your child to accomplish and talk about what skills will be needed to be able to achieve those activities. Provide support to your child so she can accomplish the activity.

Domain/domain element	Activities to facilitate domain specific skills
Reasoning and problem solving	Discuss the why, how, and what if of daily events.
Physical health and development	
Fine motor skills	Help with chores, write, draw, cut out coupons, pour milk, and other activities that occur throughout the day and provide opportunities to practice fine motor skills.
Gross motor skills	Practice different ways of coming to the table (hopping, crawling, walking backward) or getting ready to go to the car for an errand.
Health status and practices	Practice brushing teeth and talk about why it is important to brush often.

Chapter 7: My Own ABC Book

Theme

My Own ABC Book: Parent and child make an alphabet book together by drawing and taking photographs of objects, people, actions, and animals in or around the home that begin with the letters of the alphabet. An alternative is for the parent and child to make a book from the letters in the child's name using pictures of people, animals, objects, or actions.

Purpose

My Own ABC Book is a theme that will help parents and children focus on literacy in a fun and engaging way. Many children this age are already learning about letters in group settings such as child care or preschool. Focusing on a similar topic at home bridges a gap between home and school, bringing the two closer together.

The topic of the book can be individualized to the particular needs of each family. Parents can make this topic as simple or as complex as they like. The important thing is to let children see that the sounds they make and the objects they see are related to the words written in a book. They should also understand that sounds combine to make words and that different words look different and mean different things. Essentially, everything the child says has a symbol (a written word) that is associated with it. Learning the names of letters will help children learn to read in school because almost all letters have their sound in their name. Children's knowledge of the alphabet is an important predictor for early reading success. Consequently, this topic is important for both parents and children.

Some parents may feel that "academics" are the domain of the teacher at school. They may also feel uncomfortable or unqualified to teach their children. Some parents come from cultural backgrounds in which education is strictly the domain of teachers and not an area that they need to become involved in. Often, the children of these parents are the ones who need their parents' involvement the most.

Conversation Starters for Book: *My Own ABC Book*

Before beginning the book, *My Own ABC Book,* you may want to discuss the parents' hopes for their children's academic future. Parents may ask their children what they want to do when they grow up. Then, ask what it will take for the children to get to that point. Parents may say it will require much studying and attention in school, without any reference to the amount of work required at home. At this point, you may talk about the importance of the parent as the first teacher of the child and how important it is to continue in that role by:

- Providing a quiet area for "school" work even before children start kindergarten.
- Monitoring homework that children bring home from school or preschool.
- Playing games that help children learn different math and language or literacy concepts.
- Supporting their children's learning by showing interest and asking questions.
- Asking questions about school activities and topics.
- Talking to their children about school tasks, successes, and concerns.
- Maintaining regular and frequent contact with their children's teachers.
- Asking their children's teachers what they can do to help their children succeed.

Some parents do not know that they can influence their children's school success. One way to start a conversation is to ask parents to remember a fun or memorable school experience to tell their children. Some parents may have had limited school success or a negative experience with school. If this is the case, discuss ways they can help make their children's experience better. Focusing on positive memories may help parents enjoy the bookmaking process with an academic topic.

Examples of Questions to Start a Conversation about the Child's ABC Book

Examples of parent questions	How to encourage parent
What would you like to do when you grow up?	What type of jobs or skills might Ernesto want to be ready for when he grows up?
What are some of your favorite things that start with the letters in your name?	I wonder if Ernesto knows the letters in his name. What would Ernesto say are some of his favorite things that start with these letters?
How should we get started?	How do you think Ernesto would like to start?
What can you think of that starts with the "a" sound?	What things does Ernesto think of when he hears the "a" sound?

Encouraging Parents

Although this may seem more like an academic topic, where a practitioner may have more expertise, it is particularly important to support the parents on this topic. The "Support" aspect of the S-A-E strategies is a helpful way for the parent to elicit the child's involvement. The following table lists several strategies that can be used to encourage sharing of interests, information, and stories to promote the parent-child relationship and children's language skills. Included are examples of how parents can support their children's language use and how home visitors can encourage the parents to support their children.

Strategies to Promote Child Language, Cognitive, and Social-Emotional Skills

Strategies	Examples of Parent Questions and Comments	How to Encourage Parent
Support		
Engage the child.	We are going to make a book together about the letters in your name! What is the first letter in your name? What are some of your favorite things that start with the letter "S"?	How do you think we can get Sammy to start thinking about the letters in her name for this book?
Follow the child's lead and allow child's active participation.	How should we take your picture so that we remember a word that starts with "S"? Should you be sleeping or playing in the snow? "Milk" is a good word for "M", but it might be kind of hard for you to pour the milk. Maybe, we can put it in this smaller container.	What are some things that Sammy likes to play with or do that start with "S"? Which ones do you think she would like to do for the picture? What do you think would work best so that Sammy can be the one with the milk in the picture?
Take turns.	Parent: "Here you write your name on the book and then I'll write my name on the book."	How does Sammy respond when you pause for a few seconds after you tell her something or ask her a question? Does she seem like she is beginning to understand the back and forth of conversation?
Ask		
Ask for more information, opinions, and feelings using "WH" questions: Why? Where? How? Who?	How do we get milk? Why is milk good for us? School does start with "S." What do you like to do at school? What else did you do today?	What do you think Sammy knows about milk? What does she like to do at school? What else happened at school today?
Expand		
Expand on what child says.	*Child:* "That's my cup!" *Parent:* "Yes, that's your cup, which begins with C. It sounds like "KKKK". What do you like to drink in your cup?"	Does she know what cup starts with? Could you tell her something about her cup or ask her a question about it?

Strategies	Examples of Parent Questions and Comments	How to Encourage Parent
Use new words.	This is a magnifying glass. It starts with the same sound as your monkey. They both start with the letter "M." M makes the "mmm" sound. M is a fun letter to write. Should we try it?	Does she know what that is? Does she know what letter it begins with and the sound it makes? Do you think she might like to try writing the letter "M"?
Bring in child's experiences.	Remember when we saw the monkey at the zoo last summer?	You were right. She sure seems to like her stuffed monkey. Has she ever seen a real monkey?

Creating a Meaningful Book

There are many different ways to approach the creation of *My Own ABC Book*. The following suggestions focus on the letters of the alphabet and also promote additional skills such as background knowledge and phonemic awareness.

Find objects, actions, or people that start with certain letters. Encourage the parent to tell the child about that object or person. For example, if the family decides to use "clock" for the letter "C", encourage the parent to tell the child more about the clock. This may include such things as: what is its use, where did it come from (this was a present from your Aunt Mary), why it is important for the family (we use the clock to tell time so we are not late for church or work).

Provide a list of items that begin with each letter of the alphabet or each letter in the child's name. If there are not objects or actions that correspond with the letters in the child's name, consider alternatives. The child and siblings can make the shape of the letters together and then you could take a photo (Example: 2 or 3 people could make the shape of the letter "K"). Also, the family can draw pictures or cut pictures out of old magazines or newspapers of objects that start with letters that might be difficult to include in photographs.

Include actions and objects that start with the same letter. This introduces alliteration—repetitions of the same initial sound—and provides more opportunities to hear the sound in several different words. In addition, it is fun to say sentences that have multiple words beginning with the same letter. This method also promotes the child's vocabulary development as the mother and child stretch to think of more and more words beginning with the letter they are using. Some examples of this could be:

- Sammy sleeps soundly (picture of Sammy sleeping on her bed).
- My mom makes magnificent muffins (picture of mom and Sammy eating or making muffins).
- Birds are busy building (picture of Sammy pointing to a bird's nest in a tree).
- Moon, motorcycle, and milk all start with the letter "M" (picture of Sammy holding her toy motorcycle, pointing to a picture of the moon in a book, sitting next to a gallon of milk).

Supporting Language and Literacy Learning

Use the following questions to learn more about what parents and their children thought about this experience. Their answers may help generate ideas for more language and literacy activities. Parents also may have questions about additional activities they can do and skills they can teach. Parents may have concerns about whether or not their children are ready to begin school. These discussions can help parents feel more comfortable with academic activities. You can use this questioning process to help you plan learning activities that will be challenging and enjoyable but not overwhelming.

Evaluation Questions
11. **See:** What happened here?
12. **Like:** What did you like?
13. **Add:** What could be added?
14. **Change:** What could be done differently?
15. **Plan:** What will we do?

Brainstorm other ideas to extend the conversation about letters and print to other everyday activities. The table below lists activities related to the topic of *My ABC Book*. These activities will extend the conversation about letters and sounds to everyday activities that also relate to the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework.

Activities Related to "My ABC Book" to Promote Children's Conversation, Language Skills, and Other Important Head Start Outcomes

Domain/domain element	Activities to facilitate domain specific skills
Language development	
Listening and understanding	Learn new vocabulary words and meanings while working with parents to come up with words and objects for each letter of the alphabet or each letter in the child's name.
Speaking and communication	Respond to questions, ask questions, and practice new words.
Literacy	
Phonological awareness	Sound out words and emphasize the first letters.
	Play rhyming games.
Book knowledge and appreciation	"Read" the homemade book.
	Read additional ABC books such as *Dr. Seuss's ABC* book.
Print awareness and concepts	Find letters, and eventually words, in the newspaper or advertisements that have familiar pictures with the words.
Early writing	Practice writing names in shaving cream, pudding, paint, or other materials that are interesting to the child.

Domain/domain element	Activities to facilitate domain specific skills
Alphabet knowledge	Play games with the goal of finding the most words that begin with a certain letter or sound. Example: mama, mouth, motor, mouse, mitten, etc.
	Make a collection of letters by cutting out letters from store advertisements and putting them in an envelope or bag.
Mathematics	
Number and operations	Count the number of letters in the alphabet and the number of letters in the child's name.
Geometry and spatial sense	Talk about the different shapes of the letters in the alphabet.
	Form the shape of letters with siblings or friends.
Patterns and measurement	Notice the patterns of sounds while looking for words that begin with familiar letters.
	Pay attention to sounds that other people's names start with.
	Find letters in the newspaper and patterns of words such as "and" and "the" in the newspaper print.
Science	
Scientific skills and methods	Use letters (words) to mark the difference between similar objects or substances such as sugar and salt.
Scientific knowledge	Play games to try to combine the sounds of different letters. Figure out which ones will go together to make sounds that you have heard, and which ones do not.
	Make nonsense words from letters that go together well and try to decide what that word would mean.
Creative arts	
Music	Sing the "ABC song."
	Sing "I Like To Eat Apples and Bananas."
Art	Draw pictures for the book. Write the child's name in large letters for a sign to go over his or her bed and help the child decorate it.
Movement	Assign family members different letters. Keep dancing or moving while someone sings the "ABC song." Stop and stand still immediately when your letter is called. Play again with different letters.
Dramatic play	Pretend to play "school" with family members.
Social and emotional development	
Self-concept	Post children's writing or pretend writing on the refrigerator.
Self-control	Play a matching game with letters on cards by spreading the cards out with the letters facing down; turn over one at a time and try to find a matching card to turn over. Start with only a few letters and add more as the child gets better at the game.

Domain/domain element	Activities to facilitate domain specific skills
Cooperation	Make another alphabet book with other family members or friends with each contributing pages, drawings, and pictures.
Social relationships	Find common letters in siblings' names and talk about those. Talk about what names mean to family members. Talk about how family members often have the same letters in their last name because they are family. Talk about what being a family means.
Knowledge of families and communities	Identify familiar letters around the community, on signs and stores. Read simple signs such as "STOP."
Approaches to learning	
Initiative and curiosity	Play a game guessing what sound a letter will make.
Engagement and persistence	Take turns telling parts of a story, either a made-up story or a familiar one.
Reasoning and problem solving	Talk about the different sounds and words of different languages.
Physical health and development	
Fine motor skills	Practice writing letters by following dotted lines.
Gross motor skills	Stomp out large letters in sand or snow.
	Draw giant letters on a sidewalk with a large paintbrush dipped in water.
Health status and practices	Wash hands or brush teeth the whole time that someone sings the "ABC song."

Chapter 8: Exploring My World Outdoors

Theme

Exploring my World Outdoors: Parents encourage children to explore, observe, discuss, and examine nature and other aspects of their neighborhoods. Children set the pace during their walks and explorations, providing parents with opportunities to comment on their children's interests.

Purpose

Nature is one of the few universals that seem to fascinate all children of all ages from all backgrounds. As children use their senses to experience nature, many questions that range from simple to sophisticated come to their minds. Most adults have the basic background information to answer some of these questions but lack the background information to answer others. This complexity and wonder of nature captivates the childhood awe in all of us and prompts us to continue to learn new things.

"The cure for boredom is curiosity. There is no cure for curiosity."--Dorothy Parker

Exploring My World Outdoors is an intriguing theme that easily ranges from simple exploration to complex examination and experimentation. This theme is a useful one to revisit often as it encourages learning new words and concepts; practicing scientific skills of observing, questioning, and experimenting; and experiencing diverse ways to move, communicate, and create. Children are easily able to lead an expedition, pointing out things that interest them, and setting a pace that allows them many opportunities to explore. Children love to show their parents their discoveries, creating many opportunities for rich, meaningful conversations.

Conversation Starters for Book

Exploring My World Outdoors is a theme that children seem to be born ready to respond to and investigate. Children who are nonverbal or just learning to speak can communicate their interest by using single words, pointing, picking up things, and using other strategies to communicate. Because almost all children are interested in the outdoors, they are likely to be motivated to learn related words, concepts, and principles as long as the focus is on the child's own experiences in the outdoors. Several conversation starters are suggested below that encourage the parent to follow the child's lead to engage the child in a conversation about the world outdoors.

Examples of Questions to Start a Conversation about Exploring My World Outdoors

Examples of parent questions	How to encourage parent
Where do you want to go for a walk?	Where does Leah like to go explore outdoors?
What do you see under the bush?	What do you think Katelyn is looking at and thinking about?
Where do you want to look first?	I wonder where Braxton would like to explore first.

The focus of the book will vary from family to family and neighborhood to neighborhood. Children's age and interest will also determine the specific topic and depth of conversation about it. A young child may want to take pictures and include pinecones, rocks, bottle caps, and other treasures found during a walk. An older child may want to observe an anthill or explore just one tree, examining what it is made of, what lives in it, and what lives under it.

Encouraging Parents

Once the conversation is started, there are several ways to support interesting and satisfying conversations about what the child is experiencing outdoors. The "Support" aspect of the S-A-E strategies is a helpful way for the parent to elicit the child's involvement. The following table lists several strategies that can be used to encourage sharing of interests, information, and stories to promote the parent-child relationship and children's language skills. Included are examples of how parents can support their children's language use and how home visitors can encourage parents to support their children.

Strategies to Use to Promote Children's Conversation and Language Skills about Exploring My World Outdoors

Strategies	Examples of parent questions and comments	How to encourage parent
Support		
Engage the child.	Show me which way you would like to go first.	I wonder where Logan would choose to go first.
	What should we include in your book?	What would he like to include in his book?
Follow the child's lead and allow child's active participation.	I'll follow you. You show me the way.	Should we just follow her and see where she wants to go?
Take turns.	I'll hold your hand while you walk on the curb and then you hold my hand while I walk on it.	She really seems to be enjoying your help. Do you think Lindsey would want to help you to walk on the curb?

Strategies	Examples of parent questions and comments	How to encourage parent
Ask		
Ask for more information, opinions, and feelings using "WH" questions: Why? Where? How? Who?	Where are all of the bugs? How do bugs get food? What do you think about those bugs?	I wonder what Kade knows about where to find bugs and what they eat. How do you think he feels about bugs? Should we ask him?
Expand		
Expand on what child says.	*Child*: It's snowing! *Parent*: What big snowflakes! The snow is coming from the clouds. What else comes down from the clouds?	Do you think she knows where the snow comes from?
	Child: Ladybug! *Parent*: Yes, here's a picture of the ladybug you were holding at the park. She had lots of spots. What did she feel like in your hand?	It seems like he is interested in the picture of the ladybug. Could you tell him more about it?
Use new words.	I love to watch butterflies. They used to be caterpillars and then they wrapped themselves up into a cocoon. In the spring they come out of their cocoon.	She is watching those butterflies really close. Do you think she knows where they come from?
Bring in child's experiences.	Do you remember when we went camping and you waded in that stream? Did that water feel like this fountain?	When else has he played in water?

Creating a Meaningful Book

As much as possible, help the parent take photos of the child walking, exploring, and examining what is interesting. Some children may be very motivated to take photos, with a parent's help, of what they are looking at. These photos may not be perfectly framed or focused, but they will reflect what was so interesting to the child, whether it is a close-up of a bug or a shot of sky and clouds. Rocks, leaves, sticks, wrappers, and other things the child picked up during the walk can be pasted into their book along with their pictures. Help the parent and child figure out ways to illustrate their book in a way that captures the child's experience.

Supporting Language and Literacy Learning

Your observation of the bookmaking process and your discussion with the parent to evaluate the activity will help you build on family interests as you suggest additional language and literacy activities. Increasing the amount of child-directed conversation about child and parent interests can add to their relationship as they learn more about each other and can significantly increase the quantity and complexity of language in the child's everyday environment.

By discussing the following evaluation questions with the parent, you can help identify opportunities for ongoing conversations about what family members like and what they dislike. Use this discussion to encourage meaningful family conversation about nature and places to explore outside. The following questions will also help you, the parent, and the child think of more ideas to use this topic for supporting language and literacy.

Evaluation Questions
1. **See:** What happened here? 2. **Like:** What did you like? 3. **Add:** What could be added? 4. **Change:** What could be done differently? 5. **Plan:** What will we do?

Brainstorm ways to extend the conversation about outdoors, explore other areas outdoors, and learn new words, concepts, and skills. Think about new outdoor places to visit in the local area. For young children, even the grounds around a public building may be a fascinating place to explore the outdoors. Family members and friends also can help provide many of these opportunities. For additional activities, see the examples provided in the table below. This table lists language and literacy-based activities and strategies related to the topic of *Exploring My World Outdoors*. These activities and strategies are linked to important developmental domains in the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework.

Activities Related to "Exploring My World Outdoors" to Promote Children's Conversation, Language Skills, and Other Important Head Start Outcomes

Domain/domain element	Activities to facilitate domain specific skills
Language development	
Listening and understanding	Listen to explanations of how plants grow, birds fly, ants eat, and other interesting things observed outdoors.
	Practice new vocabulary related to what you explored outdoors.
Speaking and communication	Respond to questions, ask questions, and practice new words related to observations made outdoors.
Literacy	
Phonological awareness	Name the first letter of the things and places included in the book and repeat the sound of those letters. Imitate sounds heard outside.

Domain/domain element	Activities to facilitate domain specific skills
Book knowledge and appreciation	Use the book to "read" about what happened and share the experience with someone who wasn't there.
	Plan a follow-up book based on other interests and unanswered questions.
	Read additional books about exploring outdoors such as *Carl's Afternoon at the Park, Stellaluna, Eliza and the Dragonfly* or tell a folktale, such as *Peter and the Wolf*.
Print awareness and concepts	Read signs such as pedestrian crossing, stop signs, recycle bins, trash cans, deer crossings, and speed limits.
Early writing	Make a list of things to observe, go for a walk, and check off the things on the list as you see them (i.e. dog, fire hydrant, yellow leaf, butterfly).
Alphabet knowledge	Identify the first letter of pictures of interesting things throughout the book. Look for letters in child's name on signs outside.
Mathematics	
Number and operations	Count rocks, butterflies, dogs, or other things that catch child's interest. Select a number, take that many steps, stop, and then look around and describe what you see.
Geometry and spatial sense	Fill bags or containers with rocks, sticks, dirt, sand, and grass. Estimate how much will fit. Try different approaches to getting as much in the containers as possible.
Patterns and measurement	Arrange rocks in order of size or sort by color. Look for patterns in flower gardens, trees, clouds, or parking lots.
Science	
Scientific skills and methods	Plant a seed and take care of the plant that sprouts. Discuss what plants need to grow. Watch and discuss an anthill, a cat with her kitten, or a spider spinning a web.
Scientific knowledge	Use all senses to explore and examine (what does it smell like, feel like, sound like?).
	Examine a flower or weed from the root system, through the stem, and to the flower. Closely examine worms or any other creature that is interesting to child.
Creative arts	
Music	Sing songs that include the sounds heard outside. Sing familiar songs about creatures and plants in nature such as *I'm Bringing Home a Baby Bumblebee, Five Little Monkeys Swinging from a Tree, or Rock-a-Bye Baby*.
Art	Draw pictures for the book. Create a collage of treasures collected on a walk outside.
Movement	Climb, run, skip, hop, kick, and dance. Move like a tree in a calm breeze and then in a fast wind. Move like different animals, birds, or insects.

Domain/domain element	Activities to facilitate domain specific skills
Dramatic play	Pretend to go on a fossil hunt, safari, or other adventure that child may or may not be familiar with.
Social and emotional development	
Self-concept	Water a plant, create a bird feeder, or clean up a sidewalk to promote understanding of responsibility, care for others, and personal values.
Self-control	Patiently watch and wait for an insect or animal to move. Carefully handle and observe fragile plants and insects. Follow rules such as crossing at crosswalks and staying on marked paths.
Cooperation	Work together to gather items for and create a collage of things collected during a walk. Work together to create a mud village, ant hotel, or hide out.
Social relationships	Take turns choosing what to do next, talk and listen to others talk about what is interesting, and plan adventures and explorations together.
Knowledge of families and communities	Walk around the neighborhood and make a map together. Include the places you see and the things that interest you.
Approaches to learning	
Initiative and curiosity	Closely examine and ask questions about plants, animals, and insects.
Engagement and persistence	Find the answer to questions that interest you. Ask your parents, and if they don't know, help them look up the answers on the internet or in the library.
Reasoning and problem solving	Look around normally. Now look at things with a magnifying glass and with binoculars. How has the picture changed? Why? Figure out how to capture an insect, create a habitat, and feed it.
Physical health and development	
Fine motor skills	Draw pictures of trees and plants. Try to draw the shapes of different kinds of trees that you see.
Gross motor skills	Run, skip, hop, walk, climb, slither, and move however you are inspired as you explore outdoors.
Health status and practices	Discuss the advantages to moving around, exercising, and exploring and the safety rules that are important in the outdoors. Talk about the air we breathe and when we should be careful.

Section 3

Evaluation

Evaluation

Overview

Findings from the Storytelling for Home Enrichment and Language and Literacy Support (SHELLS) curriculum evaluation are promising. These findings indicate that home visitors are able to implement SHELLS effectively and families are engaged in these home visits. Parents who received SHELLS home visits, compared with those who did not, used more eliciting strategies to get their children talking during shared narratives. Parents in the SHELLS group increased the complexity and quality of their conversations and narratives with their children by asking more questions and elaborating more on children's comments than they did before the SHELLS home visits. Parents in the SHELLS group also improved their family reading practices and attitudes, had more books available to the child, read to their children more often during the week, and provided more learning opportunities at home.

Children in both groups significantly increased the number of words they used during book sharing with their mothers, but only the children in the SHELLS group increased the number of words they used to tell about a recent event in a conversation with the parent. These results are promising as one specific focus of SHELLS was to enrich ongoing parent-child conversations.

In summary, our findings suggest that the SHELLS curriculum is effective in enriching the home language and literacy environments of families from diverse cultural and language environments. Helping families make books that are personally and culturally meaningful can facilitate the language and emergent literacy development of some of the most vulnerable children entering our school systems. The methods and results of the SHELLS evaluation are described below. A case-study describing one family's experience receiving the SHELLS home visits and their perceived benefit follows.

Evaluation Methods

Families attending a Migrant Head Start program were invited to participate in the SHELLS evaluation and then were randomly assigned to two different groups. All families received services from The Migrant Head Start program, which served children 5 days per week for an average of 6-7 hours per day. The program also provided home visits by classroom teachers twice during the school year and by family support specialists at least every other month. The SHELLS treatment group received SHELLS home visits one to 2 times per month in addition to the ongoing services provided by the Head Start program. The comparison group received regular Head Start services.

Sample

Seventy-seven families (47 with boys, 30 with girls) agreed to participate in the SHELLS

research project. All of the parents were immigrants to the US, mostly from Mexico, and described their ethnicity as Mexican, Mexican-American, or Chicano, but most of the children were born in the US. About half the sample reported that extended family, such as an aunt or uncle, lived with the parents and children. Most parents were married (78%). Most mothers had been educated outside the US and had less than a high school education, with an average of 8.3 years of education. All the mothers spoke primarily Spanish, with their Spanish vocabulary, on average, at a 6th grade level. There were no group differences on these characteristics between the families who ran randomly assigned to the SHELLS group and those assigned to the comparison groups or between those who completed the evaluation post-test and those who did not.

Interviews, assessments, and observations were conducted before (pretest) and after (posttest) a series of SHELLS home visits were made to the SHELLS group. Children ranged in age from 22 to 60 months at the pretest, with an average age of 41 months. Most of the children were more comfortable with speaking Spanish; however, the pretest was administered in English to one child to accommodate her language preference.

Parent-child book sharing and shared narratives. Parents and children were observed interacting during two tasks: talking about a recent event and looking at a book together. Parent behaviors used to assist child language during the shared book reading and narrative tasks were tallied using a list of 14 behavior categories (Whitehurst et al., 1988) used to create 3 factors: *Basic Involvement, Simple Eliciting, and Complex Eliciting. Basic Involvement* included ratings of praise, corrections, memory prompts, and directives. *Simple Eliciting* included ratings of reading, elaborations, and asking yes/no questions. *Complex Eliciting* included ratings of open-ended questions and expansions. Child language from the book sharing and shared narrative videotaped interactions was transcribed and analyzed for the number of different words used (word types), and the total number of words used (word tokens) for each interaction separately.

Home environment. The Language/Literacy subscale of the Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment (HOME) was used to assess the amount and type of language and literacy support available to the child. The HOME uses an observational unstructured interview approach to assess parent-child interactions and parents' provision of objects and experiences to toddlers that provide opportunities for stimulation and growth (Caldwell & Bradley, 1984).

Literacy attitudes and behaviors were assessed using the Family Reading Survey (adapted from Whitehurst, 1990) which is a multiple-choice and fill-in-the-blank questionnaire asking about family reading practices and attitudes, the number of books available to the child, and the number of adult-child reading sessions per week.

Treatment Fidelity

Two native Spanish-speaking home visitors conducted all of the home visits, with the caseloads split evenly between the two. One home visitor had a master's degree in special education and the other home visitor was a former Head Start parent who had completed high school and

worked in Head Start for several years. Families received an average of 4.63 home visits, with the number of visits ranging from 1 to 8.

As part of treatment fidelity measurement, trained observers rated the quality of seven home visits on four different scales. Three scales were used from the Home Visit Observation Rating Scales (HOVRS; Roggman et al., 2008): (1) home visitor facilitation of parent-child interaction; (2) parent engagement; and (3) child engagement. An additional scale was developed for this project that measured implementation of SHELLS activities and strategies. The ratings in the following table show that the curriculum was implemented as intended, with the home visitor responsively and effectively facilitating parent-child interaction, and with parents and their young children highly engaged in the home visit activities.

Implementation Ratings from Observations of Home Visits Using SHELLS Curriculum

	SHELLS implementation	**HV facilitation of parent-child interaction**	**Parent engagement**	**Child engagement**
Mean scores	6.4 (range 5-7)	6.1 (range 5-7)	7 (range 7-7)	6.7 (range 5-7)

When parents were asked if they enjoyed their home visits, they agreed that they did (4.74 on a 5 point scale; range 3-5). Parents were also asked whether the home visit activities supported their families' values and customs, and again, they agreed that they did (4.74 on a 5 point scale; range 3-5).

Evaluation Results

Does participation in the SHELLS curriculum result in improved conversation and narratives (quality, complexity, frequency) between parent and child?

Our initial evaluation results suggest that participating in the SHELLS curriculum may contribute to improved conversation and narratives between parents and their children. A key strategy of SHELLS is to support parents in eliciting conversation and information from their children. Eliciting strategies such as using open-ended questions, expansions, confirmations, and conversations were coded during a two minute narrative where the mother was asked to help the child talk about a recent event. Mothers in the SHELLS group used more eliciting strategies during this narrative at post-test than the comparison group mothers.

In addition, only the mothers who had the SHELLS home visits increased the frequency of *Basic Involvement*, *Simple Eliciting,* and *Complex Eliciting*.

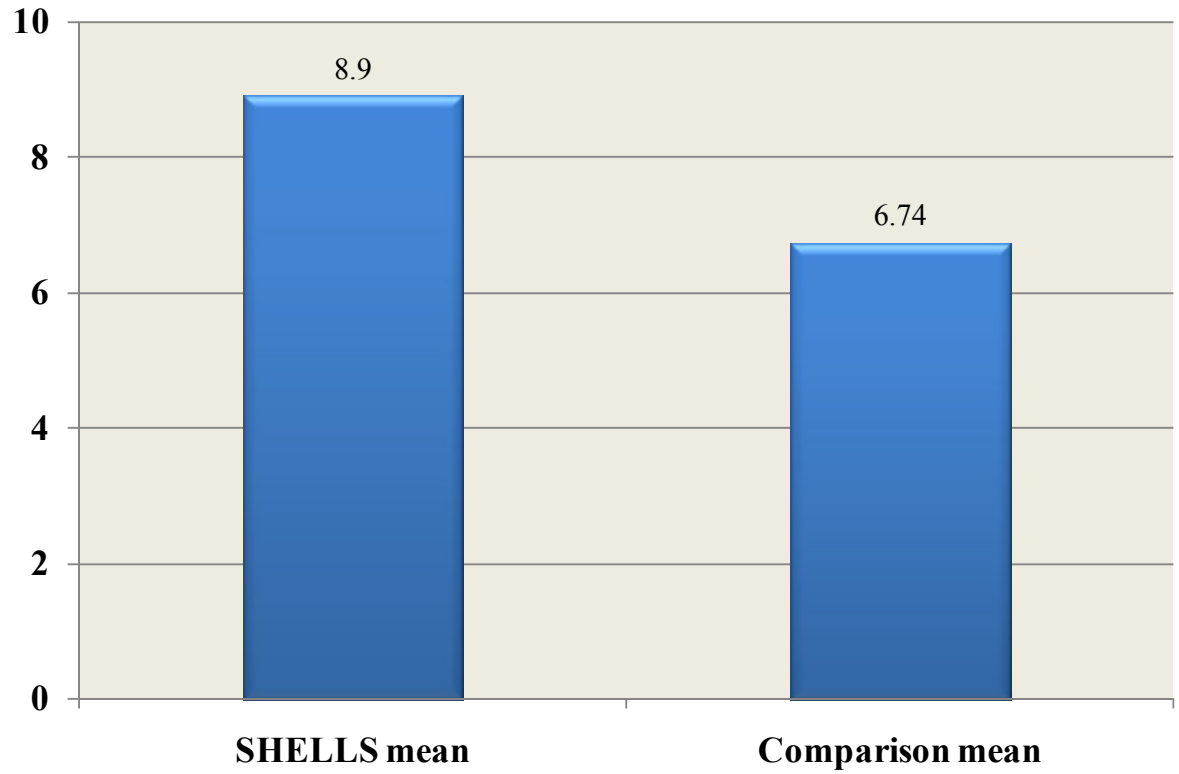


Figure 2. Group differences in mean number of eliciting strategies during shared narratives.

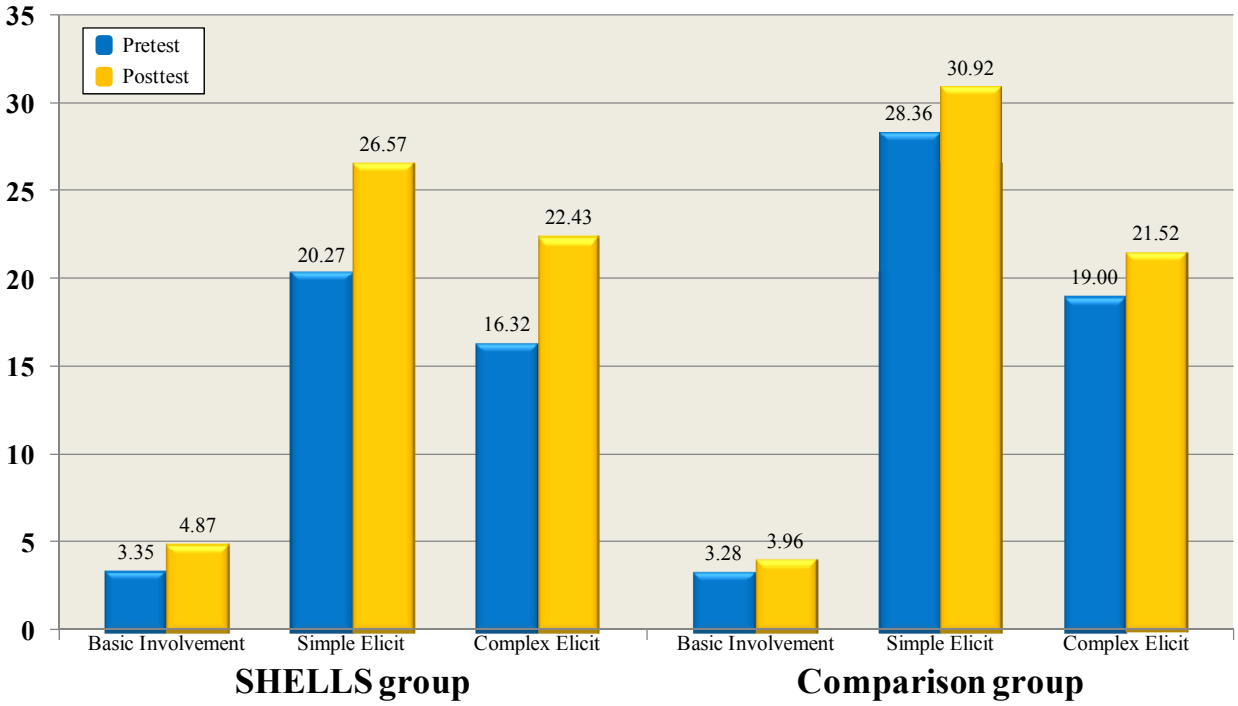


Figure 3. Basic involvement, simple elicit, and complex elicit subscales during book sharing interaction from pre- to posttest.

Several parents described their perceptions of how their SHELLS home visits influenced their conversations with their children when they were interviewed at the end of the project. Examples of these comments, translated into English with names changed, are presented in the following table.

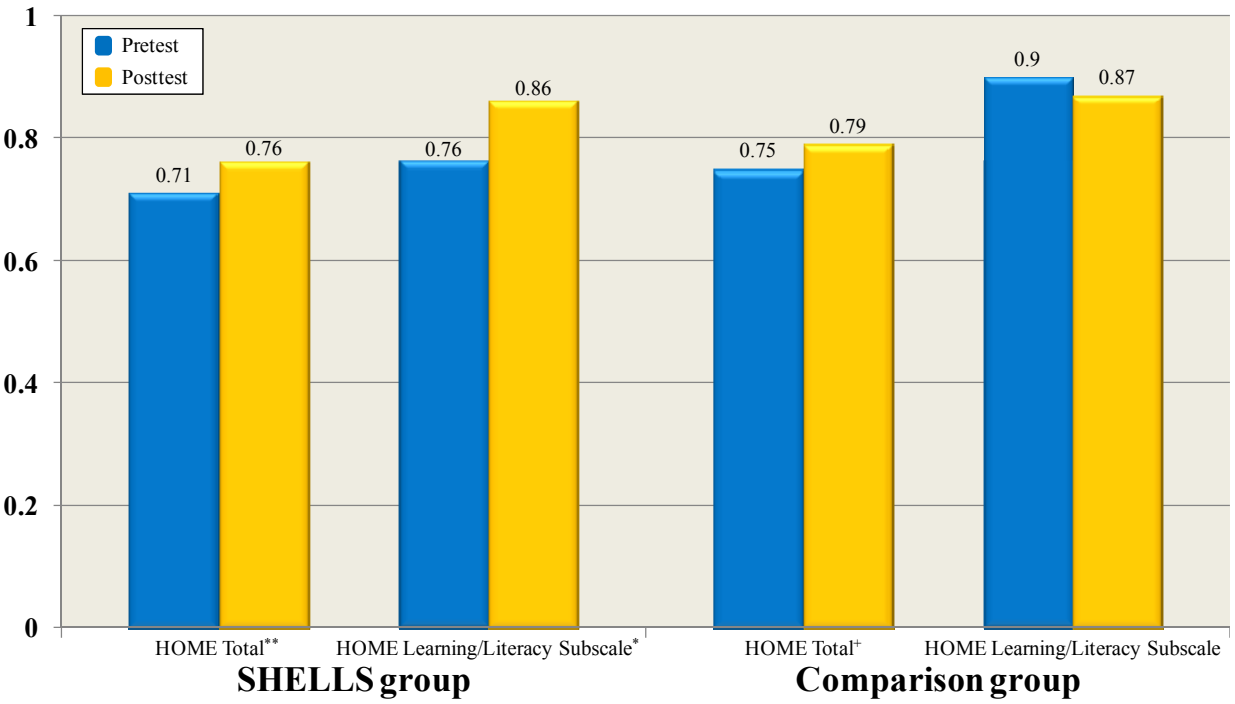
Parent Perceptions of the Influence of SHELLS Home Visits

Parent Perception of Changes in Their Approach to Communicating with Child
I learned ways to talk and participate with my daughter and different ways of coexisting and learning.
We didn't read to Shari before the visits now she brings the books for reading time.
I have a little bit more patience with Carlos, also it gave him a little bit more opportunity to explain what he saw.
We look for opportunities to talk, even when we ride in the car.
When Elian asks questions I explain it more so he will understand it better.
I learned to pay more attention to what he asks or what he wants me to do and have more interest in my children and not only when there are visits.
Parent Perception of Changes in Their Child's Approach to Communicating with Others
The conversations are longer and she asks things she didn't ask before.
There is more communication because Javier takes the book and he says what he is doing now.
She talks more with everyone in the house.
Alex progressed a lot in his speech. He has more knowledge and is more independent.
He started to talk earlier than we thought. The activities helped him a lot even with him having some problems with his language development.
She has more questions and asks more about the meaning of new words.

Does participation in the SHELLS curriculum result in an enriched home language and literacy environment?

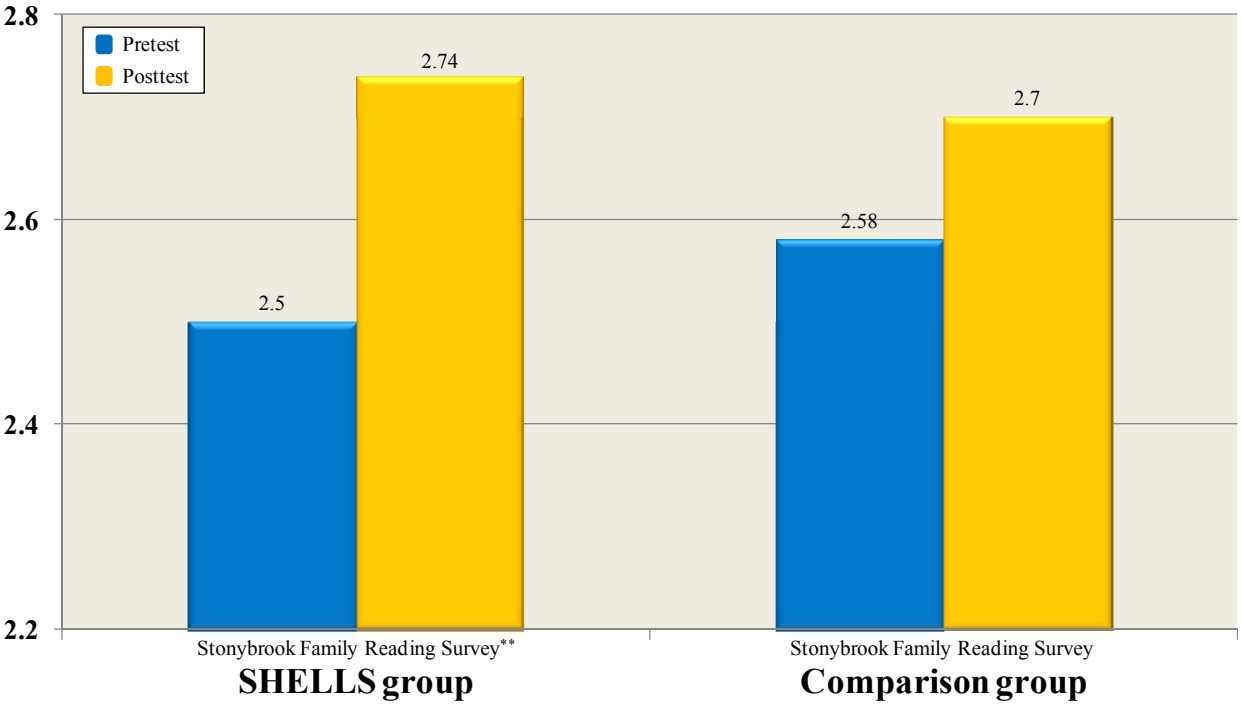
Yes, the home language and literacy environment improved for the SHELLS group.

The SHELLS group's home language and literacy environment, as measured by the HOME and the Stonybrook Family Reading Survey, improved in terms of family reading practices and attitudes, the number of books available to the child, how often parents read to the children, and how well parents provided learning opportunities for the children. These measures reflect the specific focus of SHELLS on supporting ongoing language and literacy activities.



+ $p > .10$; * $p > .05$; ** $p > .01$

Figure 4. Changes in the home language and literacy environment from pre- to posttest



** $p > .01$

Figure 5. Changes in family attitudes and reading practices from pre- to posttest.

Research Question 9. Does participation in the SHELLS curriculum result in increased child language skills?

Transcript data collected during the shared narrative and shared book reading interactions reflect substantial language growth for all of the children attending the high quality Head Start program. Only the children in the SHELLS group, however, increased the number of words they used during shared narratives when they were asked to tell about a recent event. These results are promising given the focus of SHELLS on promoting improved conversation and narratives between parents and their children.

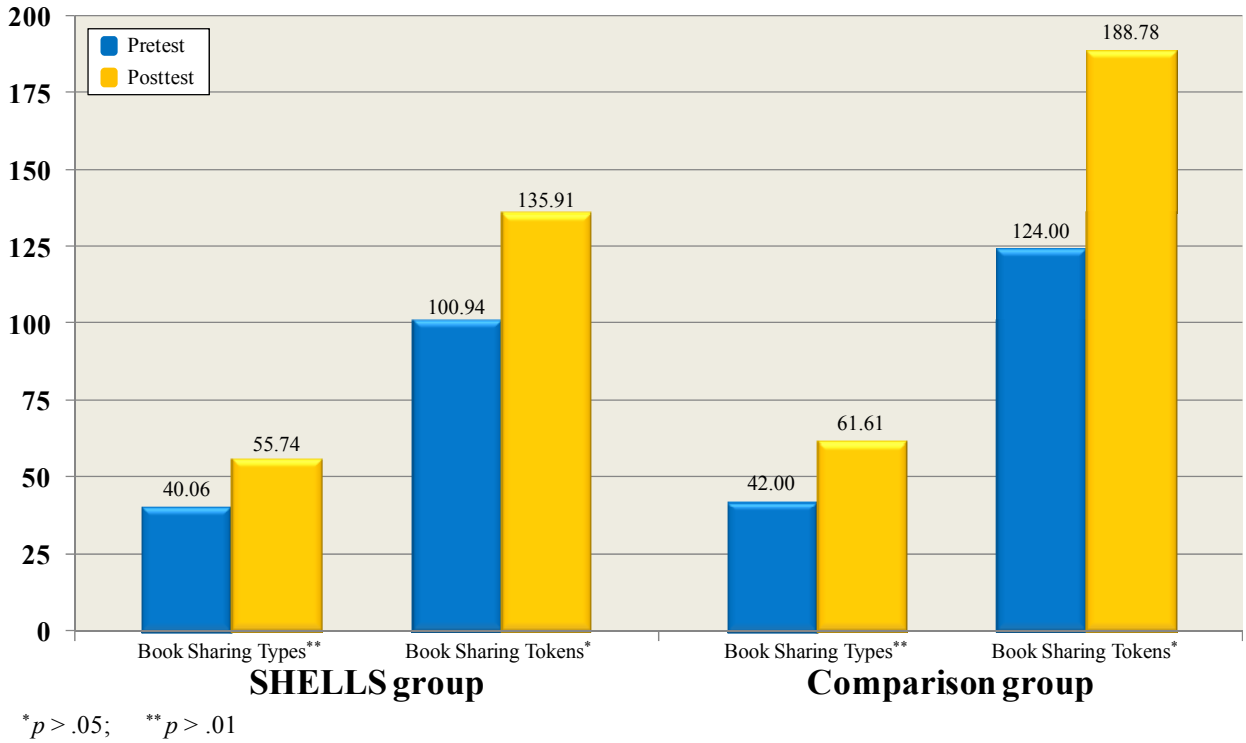
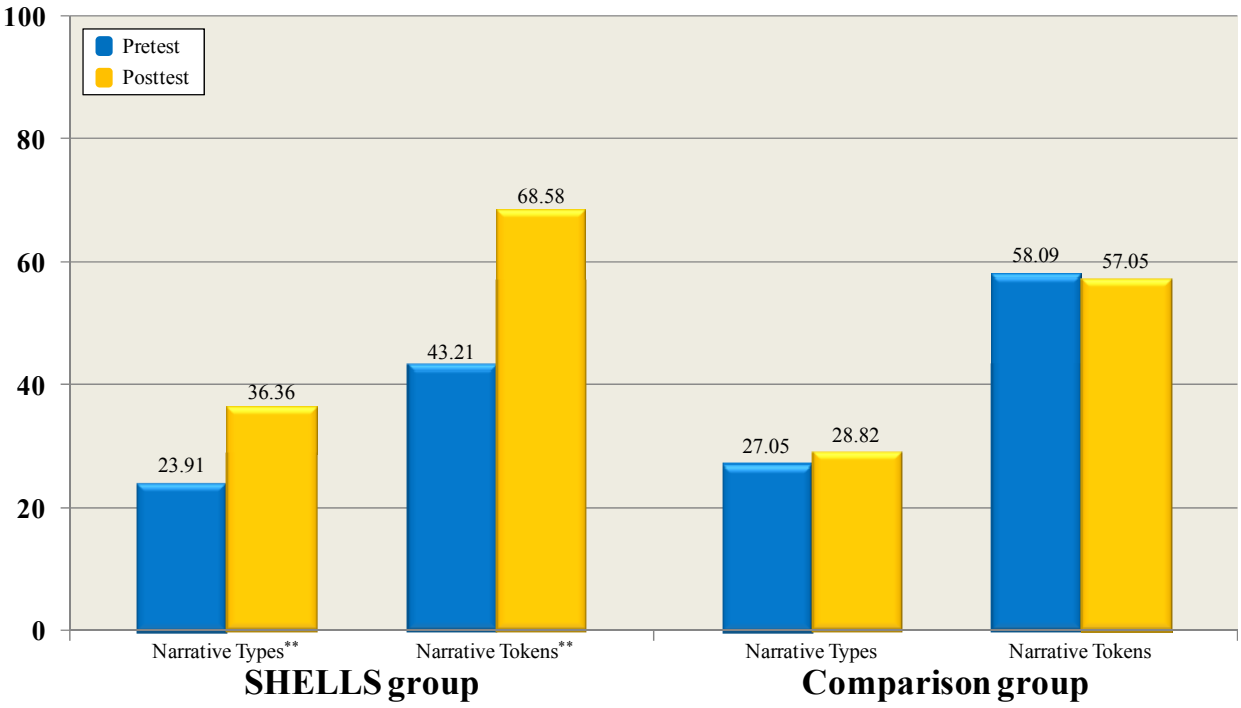


Figure 6. Changes in number of word types and word tokens during the book sharing interaction.



** $p > .01$

Figure 7. Changes in number word types and word tokens during the shared narrative.

In summary, our evaluation results are promising. Our restricted intervention period of about four months was less than half of the 9-month period anticipated for implementation of the SHELLS curriculum. Nevertheless, even in this short implementation period the SHELLS curriculum appeared to enrich families' home language and literacy environments. Replication of these findings with a larger sample size and a lengthier intervention period are needed and would likely strengthen and support these initial findings.

SHELLS Case Study

Ramona had a 6th grade education in Mexico, and her husband had made it to the 11th grade. They married in Mexico, and when there was a shortage of work, they decided to come to the US with their three young children to work. After their arrival, their youngest son, Manuel, was born. Ramona understands some English but is not comfortable speaking it. She speaks only Spanish to her four boys, who range in age from 3 to 16. When interviewed, Ramona reported little or no acculturation into the "English" language environment to which she had moved.

Manuel watches television from 2 to 4 hours per day, and the family has more than 40 books in the home. According to Ramona, before he entered into the SHELLS program, he asked to be read to once or twice per week. After the SHELLS program was over, she stated that he asked to be read to every day, and the day before the assessment, she had read to him for more than 20 minutes. When Manuel was assessed in Spanish on the Preschool Language Scale-4th edition at the pretest, his total language (expressive and receptive) standard score was 106, which placed

him in the 66th percentile, with an age equivalent of 3 years, 6 months, although he was only 3 years, 1 month old. At the end of the SHELLS program, Manuel was tested on the Spanish version of the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, and scored 138, which placed him in the 99th percentile, at a level of 6 years, 1 month in receptive language skills. Although his mother, Ramona, had gone to school only up to the 6th grade, her language skills were at an 8th grade level at the pretest according to the Spanish edition of the Woodcock-Munoz Language Survey. Ramona is very concerned with helping her children succeed in school, but she said that before the SHELLS program, she did not know how to help them.

Ramona was finally persuaded to enroll her youngest son, Manuel, in the local Migrant Head Start program by the program's social worker, who knew her from the Spanish-speaking community and had won her trust. As a recent immigrant in an area that had recently experienced immigration raids, Ramona was not a person who trusted such agencies and she preferred to be with her young child at home. However, her social worker convinced her that Manuel would benefit from the experience and that he would have fun while he was learning. Because the family had a good experience with the Head Start program, when her social worker asked her to be part of a project investigating family literacy, Ramona agreed to participate. She and Manuel were assigned to the book-making group, which meant that they had a home visitor come to their home once every other week to help the family make homemade books. Before the visits began, Ramona was nervous because feared she would lose her privacy, but once Lucy, her home visitor, came to her home, she felt much better. Lucy was a native Spanish speaker also, and she told Ramona that they would make books in Spanish!

Ramona and Manuel decided last week to make a book using a family recipe. When Anna arrived, Ramona and Manuel were ready to cook! Ramona wanted to make a cake using her mother's famous family recipe. Ramona's mom died two years ago, and Ramona thought this would be a wonderful way to honor her mom, help her son connect with this important part of their family, and to have the recipe in a written format. Ramona began by telling about when her mother would make the cake. Manuel listened attentively to his mother's beautiful storytelling as she reminisced about her mother. As Ramona spoke, she told Manuel what ingredients to add, and helped him. Four eggs. Manuel cracked each one carefully as his mother guided him and continued talking. Anna documented the process by taking photographs as Manuel and his mother cracked eggs, measured milk, and spilled flour as they tried to get the right amount. Everybody was laughing as Manuel and Ramona cleaned up the flour. Once the mess was cleaned up and the flour on hands, shirts, and Manuel's mouth was momentarily forgotten, Manuel mixed the ingredients under the expert guidance and support of his mom.

While the cake was baking in the oven, Ramona and Manuel began to make their book, using the photographs taken by Anna. Manuel "wrote" out his version of the recipe and his mother wrote words to help her remember what he said he "wrote." Manuel and Ramona took turns writing, and Ramona writes out the instructions for making the cake on one page. The pictures and words describing this fun event were used to make a beautiful book for Ramona and Manuel to read together and share with other family members. Ramona took one last step by writing a small note to her mom, thanking her for all she has done for her, and telling her that she will make sure Manuel always holds her in his heart. At last the book was ready, titled "Ramona and

Manuel's Day in the Kitchen." Now it was time to see how the cake turned out. Manuel served Ramona and Anna, and Ramona, Manuel, and Anna ate the delicious creation they made.

After the program ended, Ramona was asked a number of questions about the SHELLS home visits. Ramona stated that she believed that the visits helped her share quality time with her family, that she learned how to get her children's attention and how to ask questions, and that she learned how to motivate Manuel to be involved in activities. She noted that Anna was always interested in what she and Manuel wanted to do, that she let them plan their activities, and that she included Ramona's entire family in helping to make books. She also stated that she learned something in each home visit. Ramona summed up her home visiting experience, "Well, if everyone worked in the same way as Lucy, I can assure you that you don't lack anything."

Why did Ramona stay in the program? Ramona's fears melted away as Lucy came into her home and interacted with her in such a way that not only respected her, but showed her how important she was in helping her child learn to talk and, eventually, to read. Lucy's approach was such that Ramona led the visit, with support from Lucy as necessary. Ramona and Manuel decided what books they wanted to make and how they wanted to make them. Both Ramona and Manuel treasured the books they made with each other. In fact, one year after the project ended, Ramona's 7-year-old son was assigned to share his Christmas traditions with the class. When he told his mother about the assignment, she immediately suggested that they make a book together about their traditions. The entire family got involved, and the resulting book is a beautiful treasure that Ramona added to the other books so that any family member could read them whenever they wanted.

More than a year after the project ended, the local Migrant Head Start program asked the researchers and Lucy to discuss the project at a statewide Head Start meeting. Lucy asked Ramona if she would be interested in talking about the project. Ramona was a little shy, but agreed to talk. The day came to present, and Ramona shyly got up to talk about the project. The original plan was that Lucy would ask her a few questions and she would answer them. However, that quickly changed, as Ramona was quite expressive about how the bookmaking project had affected her and her family. In fact, the translator could barely keep up! In addition to talking about the project, Ramona brought 9 or 10 books to pass around, including the one her 7 year-old son had made with the family. When she finished talking, everybody began clapping their hands, and thanked her profusely for sharing her story. One member of the audience was touched and gave Ramona a Head Start pin to say thank you.